NC SARA

National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

2022
ANNUAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION: A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

A letter from Lori Williams, Ph.D.

Dear Friend of NC-SARA,

Thank you for your interest in the 2022 Annual Report from the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA). I am proud to share the accomplishments of our organization over this past year as we've continued to support SARA state members and participating institutions in the important work protecting student consumers while expanding students' access to quality educational opportunities and ensuring more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance education across state lines.

As you will read in this report, 2021-2022 marked a year of continued service to states and institutions, as well as organizational development and growth for NC-SARA. It was the second year of our three-year strategic plan, through which we have been addressing important goals and objectives for strengthening NC-SARA, enhancing and promoting the value of SARA, and improving the effectiveness of our work.

In the last year, we also launched several planned initiatives in fulfillment of our strategic plan, including:

• NC-SARA's Data Dashboards, which make data from SARA-participating institutions more accessible to the public to help inform broader and deeper conversations about distance education trends across states.

• SARA Source, NC-SARA's searchable catalog of distance education program information from SARA institutions nationwide.

• SARA Educational Resources including SARA Quick Start Guides, new educational event programming, and online courses.

In addition to these key NC-SARA initiatives, during the continuing pandemic, we saw an increase in SARA-participating institutions, signaling to us that online learning is not going away. We also saw the continuing maturation of NC-SARA as our board of directors sought to reflect on the roles and responsibilities of SARA leadership and considered changes to our policy review and revision process to provide more openness, transparency, and stakeholder voice. We also have been operating as a partner in good faith with our U.S. Department of Education colleagues in the context of proposed changes that emerged out of negotiated rulemaking in the spring of 2022.

From helping institutions reduce cost and bureaucracy, to engaging and supporting the essential work of states and institutions in promoting distance education quality, to amplifying SARA's role in assuring essential consumer protections for students, the last year tells the continuing story of the opportunities and partnerships involved in building a stronger and better infrastructure for students and institutions involved in interstate distance education.

Of course, this work would not be possible without the dedication and determination of the NC-SARA staff, NC-SARA's regional compact partners and regional steering committees, SARA member states and participating institutions, and our board. I am immensely grateful for everyone's hard work and commitment to this mission and to SARA.

Lori Williams

ABOUT NC-SARA

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a private nonprofit organization [501(c)(3)] that helps expand students' access to educational opportunities and ensure more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance education programs.

Recognizing the growing demand for distance education opportunities, higher education stakeholders – including state regulators and education leaders, accreditors, the U.S. Department of Education, and institutions – joined together in 2013 to establish the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA), which streamline regulations around distance education programs.

In partnership with four regional compacts, NC-SARA helps states, institutions, policymakers, and students understand the purpose and benefits of participating in SARA. Today, more than 2,300 institutions in 49 member states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands all voluntarily participate in SARA.

NC-SARA'S MISSION

To provide **broad access** to postsecondary education opportunities to students across the country;

To increase the **quality and value of higher learning credentials** earned via distance education; and

To assure **students are well served** in a rapidly changing education landscape.

BY THE NUMBERS

9

Nine years ago in 2013, stakeholders came together to form SARA.

2,300+

As of May 2022, 2,362 **institutions participate in SARA**, including 108 institutions that joined SARA just in the last year.

100% All participating institutions **choose to voluntarily participate in SARA**.

4

NC-SARA **collaborates with 4 regional compacts** to advance our mission of expanding students' access to educational opportunities and ensuring more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance education programs.

30

30 states and territories do not regulate distance education taking place in their state if the institutions are not SARA participants. When institutions participate in SARA, they are held to more consistent standards.

52

Every state (except California) is a **member of SARA**, along with the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

66%

Public institutions represented the majority (66%) of exclusively distance education enrollments in Fall 2020, the most recent year of NC-SARA's Annual Data Report.

261,275

out-of-state learning placements – learning activities such as clinical rotations, student teaching, internships, and other similar experiences -- took place out-of-state from SARA-participating institutions in calendar year 2020, the most recent year of NC-SARA's Annual Data Report. **Nearly 57% of these were in health professions.**

75%

Today, more than 75% of **eligible U.S. postsecondary institutions** that offer distance education participate in SARA.

6 million

Nearly 6 million **students were enrolled exclusively in distance education programs** at SARA-participating institutions in Fall 2020, the most recent year of NC-SARA's Annual Data Report.
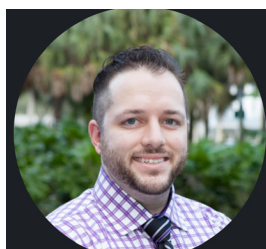
$470 million

SARA has **helped participating postsecondary institutions** save a total of $470 million for initial authorization and approximately $155 million annually on renewals.

THE NC-SARA TEAM

NC-SARA staff are passionate, committed experts who are dedicated to NC-SARA's mission, focused on the strategic priorities of the organization, and committed to high quality work in service to SARA.
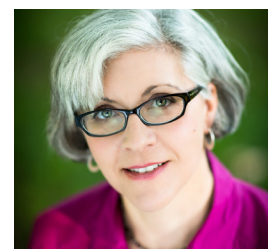
RAY AUDETT
Assistant Director for Information Technology

MARIANNE BOEKE, PH.D.
Vice President, Research and State Partnerships

MELANIE BOOTH, ED.D.
Vice President, Educational Programs and Communications

RACHEL CHRISTESON, PH.D.
Associate Director for Research and Data Analysis

STACEY HOGAN, PH.D.
Project and Events Manager
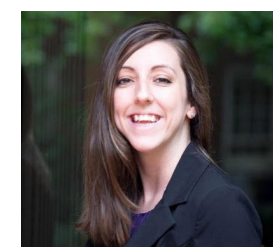
AUSTIN KELLY
Salesforce Developer

MARY AGNES LARSON
Executive Director for Student and Institution Support

NICK ORTIZ
Application Programmer/Analyst

YOVANI PINA
Director of Information Technology

ASHLEY RASMUSSEN
Director of Finance

TERRI TAYLOR-STRAUT
Educational Programs Architect and Research Analyst

BEVERLY WADE
Assistant Director for Student and Institution Support

SHANNON WALKER
Associate Director for Business Operations/HR

LORI WILLIAMS, PH.D.
President and Chief Executive Officer

JEANNIE YOCKEY-FINE
General Counsel and Vice President, Policy and Regulatory Affairs

Not pictured **Schuyler Perry**, Administrative Operations Coordinator

THE NC-SARA BOARD

NC-SARA is governed by a Board of Directors composed of experts in higher education, state leadership, advocacy, and distance education.

The Board of Directors is focused on supporting our work to improve students' access to quality postsecondary distance education opportunities. We are enormously appreciative that these talented professionals continue to offer their time, engagement, and experience to help guide our work.

NC-SARA BOARD LEADERSHIP

Edward "Ed" Ray (Chair)
President Emeritus and Professor of Economics, Oregon State University

Rob Anderson (Vice Chair)
President, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)

Leroy Wade (Treasurer)
Deputy Commissioner, Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development

BOARD MEMBERS

Chris Bustamante, Ed.D.
Executive Director, Arizona Community College Coordinating Council

John Cavanaugh
Former President & CEO, Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area

Art Coleman
Managing Partner and Co-Founder, EducationCounsel, LLC

Laurie Dodge
Vice Chancellor of Institutional Assessment & Planning and Vice Provost at University of Massachusetts Global

Lanna Dueck
Executive Director, Arizona SARA Council

Barbara Gellman-Danley
President, Higher Learning Commission

Susan G. Heegaard
President, Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC)

Angela Lee
Executive Director, District of Columbia Higher Education Licensure Commission

Demarée Michelau
President, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)

THE NC-SARA BOARD (cont'd)

Carlos Morales
President, Tarrant County Colleges Connect Campus

Patricia O'Brien
Senior Vice President, New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE)

Eduardo M. Ochoa
President, California State University, Monterey Bay

Stephen Pruitt
President, Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)

Pamela "Pam" Quinn
CEO/Provost, LeCroy Center and Dallas Colleges Online, Dallas College (retired)

Jason Rojas
Majority Leader, Connecticut House of Representatives

Elise Scanlon
Principal, Elise Scanlon Law Group

Paul Shiffman
Chief Executive Officer, Presidents' Forum at Excelsior College (retired)

Peter Smith
Orkand Chair and Professor of Innovative Practices in Higher Education, University of Maryland Global Campus

Michael Thomas
President and CEO, New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE)

Larry Tremblay
Deputy Commissioner of Planning, Research and Academic Affairs, Louisiana Board of Regents

Sarah Armstrong Tucker
Chancellor, West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

> **"**
> I'd like to share my personal gratitude to each of the past and present NC-SARA board members for their dedication to the mission of our complex organization, as well as their expertise, support, and critical decision-making on behalf of quality interstate distance education for students.
>
> **Lori Williams, Ph.D.**

REGIONAL COMPACT PARTNERS

Learn about the essential leaders and partners that make SARA work

NC-SARA works collaboratively with leadership from each of the four regional education compacts in support of our shared goal to expand quality distance education options across state lines.

Each regional compact provides staff devoted to supporting SARA and leading the shared work of SARA implementation. Regional compacts provide on-the-ground assistance to and oversight of the states and institutions in their respective regions.

Southern Regional Education Board
President: *Stephen L. Pruitt, Ph.D.*
Regional SARA Director: *Elisa Jaden, Program Specialist, Regional SARA Director, Student Success and Access*

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education
President: *Demarée Michelau, Ph.D.*
Regional SARA Director: *Molly Hall-Martin Ph.D., Director, WICHE State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, Policy Analysis and Research*
Regional SARA Coordinator: *Shelley Plutto, Project Manager, W-SARA*

Midwestern Higher Education Compact
President: *Susan Heegaard, J.D.*
Regional SARA Director: *Emily Jacobson, Associate Director of M-SARA*
Regional SARA Coordinator: *Leah Reinert Ph.D., Policy and Research Manager*

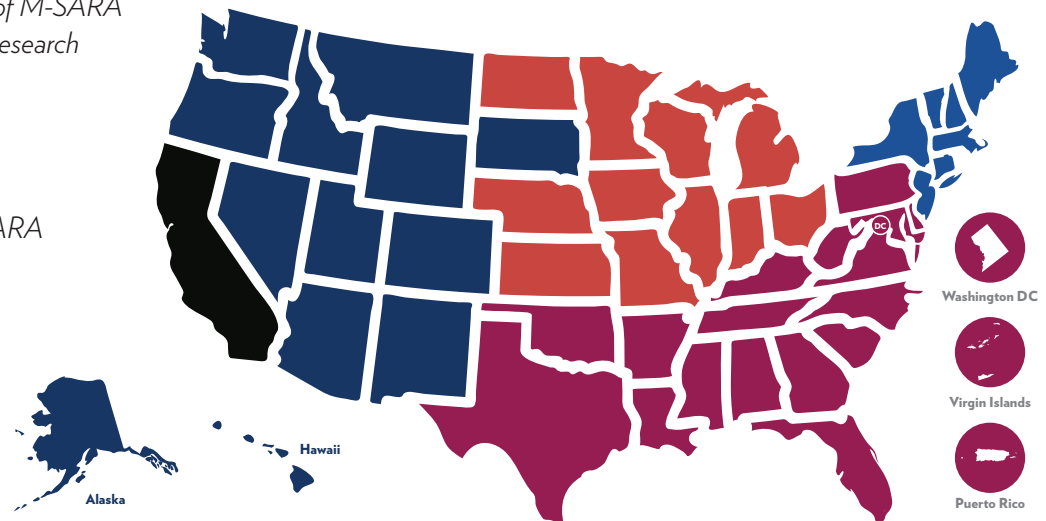## New England Board of Higher Education
President: *Michael K. Thomas, Ph.D.*
Regional SARA Director: *Jared Abdirkin, Regional Director, SARA*
Regional SARA Coordinator: *Sheridan Miller, Assistant Director, Policy & Research and State Support*

LEGEND

MHEC   NEBHE   SREB   WICHE
NON MEMBER

Washington DC

Virgin Islands

Puerto Rico

Hawaii

Alaska

NC-SARA'S ENGAGED COMMITTEES:
Leadership & Guidance from the Field

In service to NC-SARA's strategic plan, and to provide for multiple avenues to listen to and collaborate with SARA stakeholders, NC-SARA has created and regularly engages with three key advisory committees to help provide feedback on or guide the work in specific areas.

NC-SARA State Portal Entity (SPE) Advisory Committee

The purpose of the NC-SARA State Portal Entity (SPE) Advisory Committee, originally formed in 2021, is to collaborate with and advise NC-SARA about SPE training needs and priorities, educational programs (e.g., Fall SPE Conference, SPE Summit, SPE workshops), the Annual SPE Survey, and data reporting to states. The Committee also serves as an important component of the SARA community to help harvest from and share effective practices across the field, and to get feedback from SPEs on ideas for SPE outreach and engagement. The Committee serves in an advisory capacity in meetings that take place six times per year.

The New NC-SARA Institution Advisory Committee

The purpose of the newly formed NC-SARA Institution Advisory Committee is to collaborate with and advise NC-SARA about needs, engagement priorities, and programming for institutions (e.g., the annual In The Field institution conference, workshops, webinars, online training modules, etc.). The Committee serves as an important component of the SARA community to help harvest from and share effective practices across the field to support SARA compliance; to be a direct voice from institutions in planning programming; and to get feedback from institutions on ideas. The Committee serves in an advisory capacity to NC-SARA and the regional compacts' SARA dedicated staff, with virtual meetings three times per year.

NC-SARA Data Advisory Committee

The NC-SARA Data Advisory Committee is the longest standing committee, and its purpose is to collaborate with and advise NC-SARA about data and research needs; to make recommendations on reporting requirements; to consider data reporting comments/questions submitted by states and institutions during the reporting period; to provide direction on potential research projects; and to act as a sounding board on data issues in general. The Committee serves in an advisory capacity to NC-SARA, with virtual meetings twice per year and one face-to-face meeting per year.

NC-SARA is grateful to all the members of these three important advisory committees for their time, commitment, and expertise on behalf of learners, institutions, states, and SARA.

Learn more about each of these committees and the expertise and organizations of their members at nc-sara.org/nc-sara-committees.

NC-SARA's STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

STATES

NC-SARA regularly works with state regulators and policymakers responsible for overseeing distance education in postsecondary institutions. Enhancing these efforts remains a top priority.

HIGHER EDUCATION AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

NC-SARA has an active partnership with many higher education agencies and organizations, including:

· Council for Higher Education Accreditation
· Council of State Governments
· Credential Engine
· Emsi
· National Association of State Administrators and Supervisors of Private Schools
· National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
· Presidents' Forum
· State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
· National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)
· And others

STUDENTS

Ultimately, SARA is focused on serving 21st century learners by providing easier access to quality distance education. Whether through interstate distance education opportunities or out-of-state learning placements, the consistent set of student consumer protections provided through SARA reassures learners that their SARA-participating institution has met several requirements to help ensure a quality learning experience.

ACCREDITORS

NC-SARA recognizes and supports the value that accreditors provide to the public regarding distance education quality assurance. We rely on the accreditors to support quality, and we regularly identify avenues to seek their partnership and guidance on initiatives.

REGIONAL COMPACTS

As always, our work with the regional compacts is essential. MHEC, SREB, NEBHE, and WICHE are important partners in administering SARA in their regions and expanding distance education opportunities across state lines.

DISTANCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

NC-SARA participates in and provides direct sponsorship and support to multiple member organizations' conferences and convenings, including:

· American Council on Education
· Competency-Based Education Network
· Council of College and Military Educators
· Online Learning Consortium
· National Association of State Administrators & Supervisors of Private Schools
· Quality Matters
· United States Distance Learning Association
· University Professional and Continuing Education Association
· WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies / State Authorization Network

INSTITUTIONS

NC-SARA supports more than 2,300 institutions that participate in SARA through our communications, resources, and regular engagement with SARA member states and regional compacts.

STUDENT CONSUMER PROTECTION GROUPS

NC-SARA has held numerous meetings with various student consumer protection advocacy organizations as well as members of the National Association of Attorneys General. We are hopeful that our shared commitments to student consumer protections will provide a strong foundation for future collaboration.

NC-SARA's STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2019, NC-SARA launched an intensive strategic planning process that involved a detailed environmental scan, individual interviews, and surveys to engage key stakeholders and identify opportunities for organizational improvements and service enhancements for our member states, participating institutions, and students.

The NC-SARA Strategic Plan is centered on four objectives, each with 2-3 associated goals and appropriate key performance indicators, that aim to help our organization expand its influence and reach, strengthen relationships, and deliver excellence and value to all our stakeholders:

1. Develop and communicate a clear, compelling message to constituents regarding the value proposition of NC-SARA;

2. Employ NC-SARA's broad collaborative relationships with accreditors, states, and institutions to promote improvements in access to and quality of distance education programs;

3. Achieve operational excellence; and

4. Continuously strengthen the partnership with regional compacts and states to seamlessly align and deliver value.

> "
> NC-SARA, through achievement of the objectives in its strategic plan, is helping to bring our organization into the forefront as a national leader in promoting quality distance education and student consumer protections in SARA member states. We are now two years into this 3-year strategic plan, and we are on track to meet all of our goals and objectives by summer 2023.
>
> **Lori Williams, Ph.D.**

2021-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

BETWEEN 2021 AND 2022, NC-SARA REALIZED SEVERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AMONG OTHERS:

SARA SOURCE

In February 2022, NC-SARA launched SARA Source, a catalog of distance education programs offered by SARA-participating institutions, along with a SARA Source Media & Marketing kit for institutions to use to showcase their involvement. As of May 2022, SARA Source has more than 1,000 programs listed and continues to grow each week! You can visit SARA Source at sarasource.org and learn more about the value of attending a program offered by a SARA-participating institution.

- **Released NC-SARA's Data Dashboards:** In collaboration with the regional compacts, State Portal Entities, and the Data Advisory Committee, NC-SARA created user-friendly data reports for states. In October 2021, we released these reports publicly on NC-SARA's website as a resource for the public to inform broader and deeper conversations about distance education trends in SARA member states. You may visit NC-SARA's Data Dashboards at nc-sara.org/data-dashboards

- **Formed and initiated the new NC-SARA Institution Advisory Committee:** We began our engagement with the newly formed Institution Advisory Committee in early 2022 to help harvest from and share effective practices across the field. Read more about all of our NC-SARA Committees on page 10 of this report!

- **Rolled out new SARA Educational Programs & Resources:** NC-SARA partnered with SARA State Portal Entities (SPEs) and regional compact staff to develop and publicly release ten SARA Quick Start Guides that are intended to help institution personnel easily understand SARA requirements to maintain compliance, communicate with colleagues, and explain the requirements to students and other stakeholders. NC-SARA also publicly launched two new online courses – SARA 101 and Foundations of Annual Data Reporting – while we continued to offer educational programs and events such as SARA SPE workshops and the annual SPE Conference, the first annual *In The Field* institutional conference (engaging more than 900 institutional participants), and several other webinars, workshops, and presentations throughout the year. See some of NC-SARA's educational resources for institutions by visiting the SARA Learning Station at nc-sara.org/sara-learning-station.

- **Implemented SARA Portal Improvements:** NC-SARA made significant enhancements to the SARA Portal, which make it easier for SARA State Portal Entities to manage institution contacts' SARA participation. Our continued improvements in processes and infrastructure help support the behind-the-scenes operational needs of SARA member states, regional compacts, and participating institutions.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2022-2023

In the next year, NC-SARA will continue our work on behalf of elevating the value of SARA and implementing the third and final year of the strategic plan. We will advance several initiatives in service to our constituents, as well as many activities that will help continue to solidify our position as a leading national voice in quality distance education, offering meaningful data and programming that can help positively shape the future of postsecondary distance education.

This next year, NC-SARA will be focusing on:

IMPROVING SARA POLICY AND ENGAGEMENT

In partnership with our regional compact partners, regional steering committees, and states, NC-SARA will soon be implementing a newly revised policy modification process to support and improve SARA stakeholders' engagement with SARA policy and to advance transparency across all constituents. We are grateful to the more than 35 individual regional compact and regional steering committee staff that helped design this new and improved approach!

SHARING DATA AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

With input from our regional compact partners and board members, and in collaboration with SARA-participating institution leaders, NC-SARA has been providing data-informed analysis of the potential implications of proposed regulatory changes with the U.S. Department of Education. NC-SARA leaders have been operating as partners in good faith with the Department, advocating for the value of reciprocity for students, institutions, and states. and sharing insights about the specific implications that could impact differing categories of SARA participating institutions, including public institutions (the majority of SARA participating institutions), private nonprofits, and community colleges.

EXPLORING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INSIGHTS

Recognizing that distance education plays an essential role in expanding credentials and skills among adult workers, NC-SARA is exploring avenues to collaborate with other stakeholders to tie the data SARA collects from its participating institutions to inform decision making about the attainment of workforce development goals at the state and regional levels.

STRENGTHENING STUDENT CONSUMER PROTECTIONS

NC-SARA member states provide student protections against false or misleading information by SARA-participating institutions through investigation and resolution of allegations of dishonest or fraudulent activity. NC-SARA maintains a publicly available online database of such SARA-related student complaints. Strengthening consumer

LOOKING FORWARD (cont'd)

protections in postsecondary distance education will remain a leading priority for NC-SARA as we seek additional avenues to advocate for quality and accountability in distance education programming.

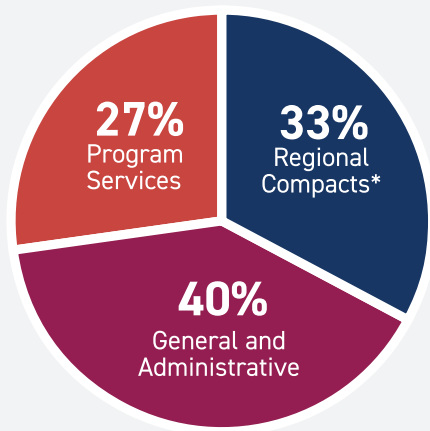## RESEARCHING STATE AUTHORIZATION CAPACITY

Forty of the 52 state offices that serve as State Portal Entities also serve as state regulators and grant institutions home state authorization as well as review those institutions for participation in SARA. The capacity of these individuals to perform this work depends upon the amount of funding provided to them, the volume of staff support, and the number institutions that seek SARA participation annually. Given the variables involved, and the fact that each state allocates resources differently, NC-SARA is interested in conducting research on state authorization capacity to help ensure quality distance education and inform decision making.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Our work is made possible by annual fees ($2,000-$6,000 each annually depending upon enrollment) paid by institutions that wish to voluntarily participate in SARA. Since the founding of NC-SARA in 2013, our institution fees have never increased and we have never charged fees to states to be members.

NC-SARA EXPENSES

27% Program Services

33% Regional Compacts*

40% General and Administrative

Includes funds toward compact reserves.

In the fiscal year July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022, NC-SARA's total income was $7.2 million. A high-level overview of how these funds have been used to support the work of SARA and our dedicated partners is provided below.

REGIONAL COMPACTS

- Supports the on-the-ground efforts of the four regional compacts as they administer SARA in their regions and engage with member states and participating institutions. Funding also provides compacts with resources to support SARA-dedicated staff.

PROGRAM SERVICES AND GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

- Funds NC-SARA engagement with higher education and distance learning stakeholders through conferences and webinars.

- Supports educational programming and training for SARA State Portal Entities and SARA institutions.

- Supports research, data collection, and reporting efforts.

- Funds resource development, such as the State Authorization Guide and Professional Licensure Directory.

- Funds communications activities and general administration of NC-SARA.

SAVE THE DATE!

JULY 12-13, 2022

IN THE FIELD:
NC-SARA'S INSTITUTION CONFERENCE

Mark your calendar for July 12 – 13, 2022 and register today to secure your spot at NC-SARA's second annual conference for SARA participating institutions!

With the theme "In the Field", this virtual conference aims to connect with and engage our partners on the ground who are working day-in and day-out to support interstate distance education, state authorization reciprocity compliance, academic planning, enrollment management, and institutional research for distance education.

Visit the In The Field information page at nc-sara.org/nc-sara-institution-conference for more details on the forthcoming agenda, speakers, and activities as they are announced.

NC SARA