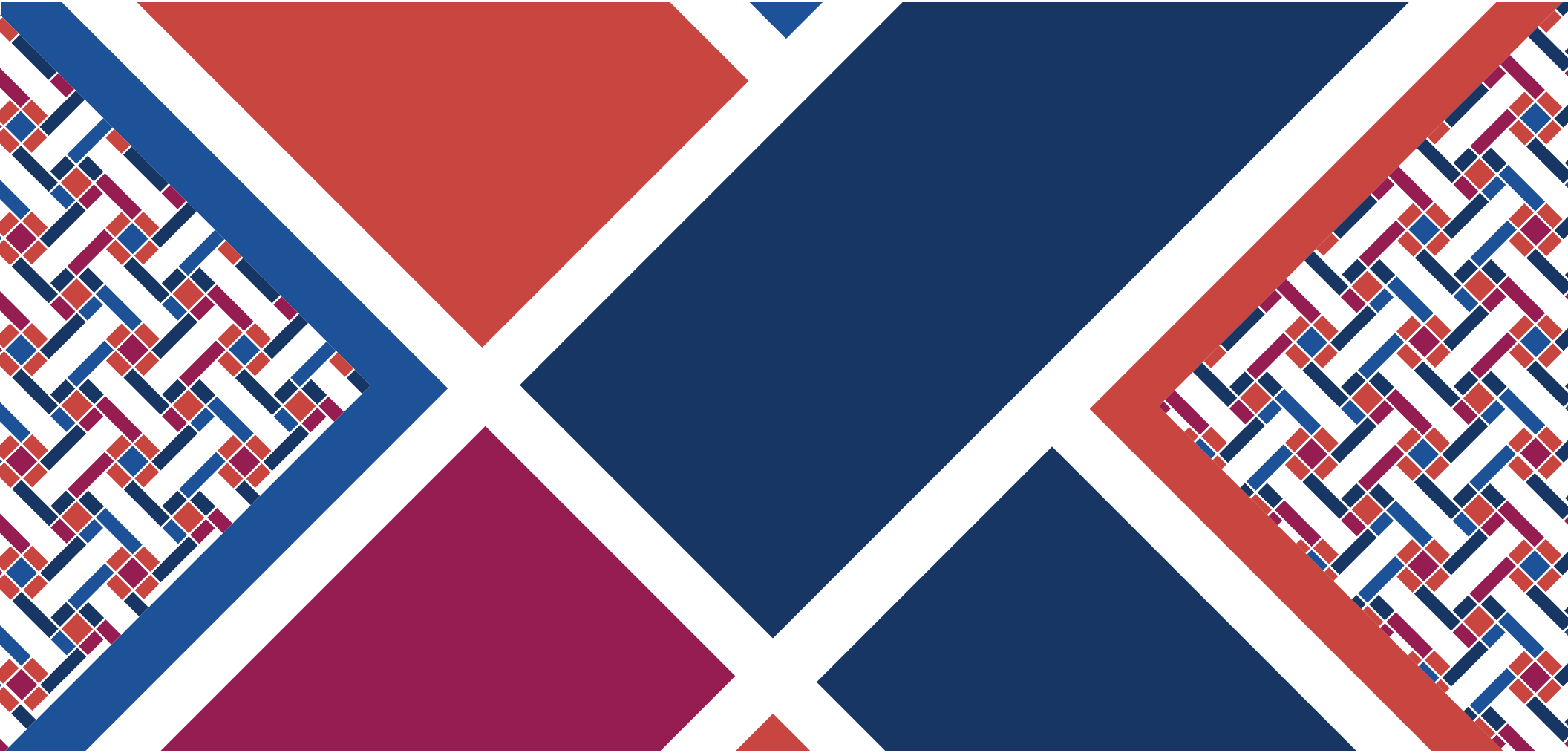

NC SARA

National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE

2026 ANNUAL REPORT

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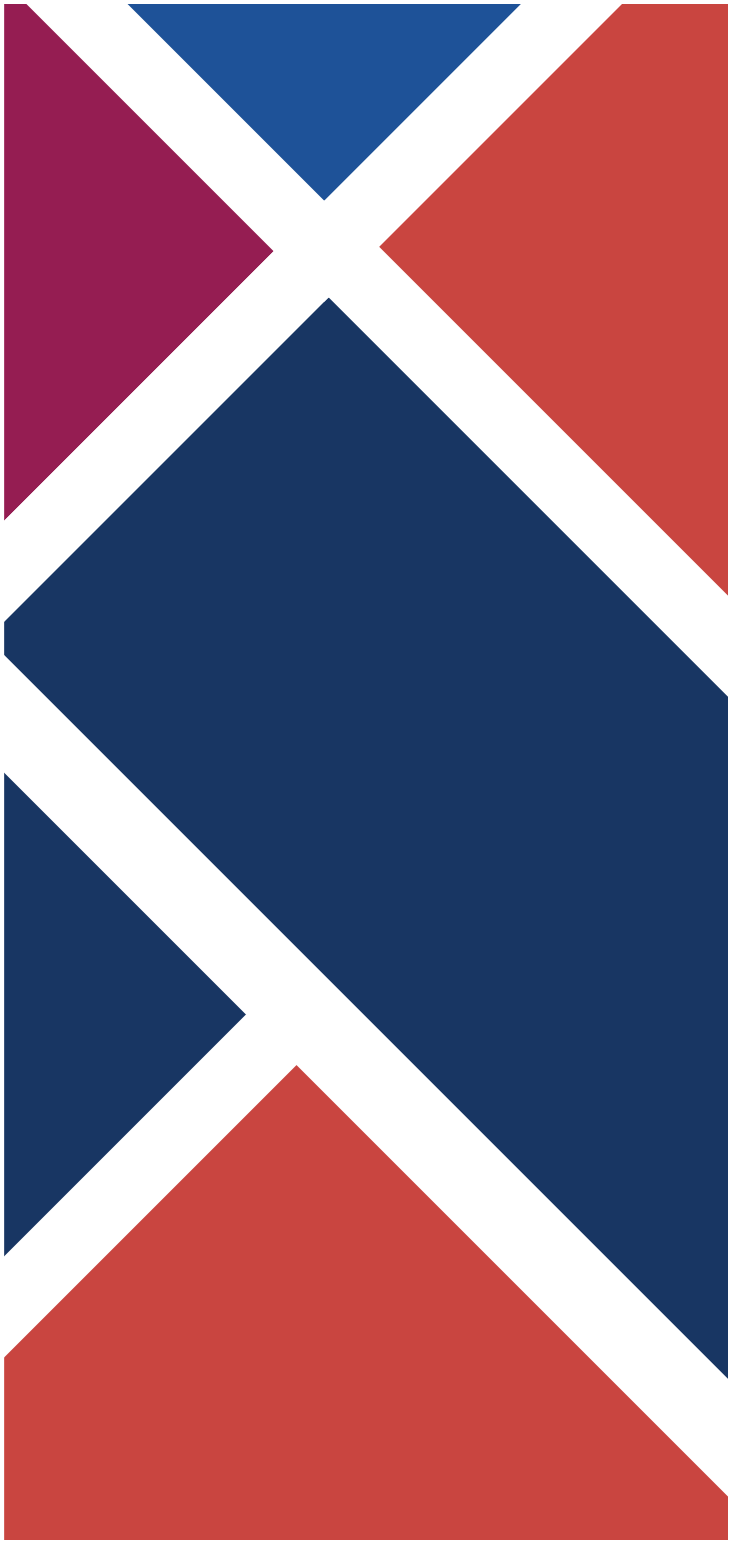


INTRODUCTION:
A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Letter from Marianne Boeke, Ph.D.

Dear Friends of SARA,

I am pleased to share the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) 2026 Annual Report. As SARA enters its 12th year, the spirit of and structures for meaningful collaboration among the 52 voluntary state, district, and territory members of SARA continue to inform both policy and practice. We often say that there is no other organized system like SARA in the higher education ecosystem, and it's this very model that allows SARA to be as impactful as it is.

This past year has been marked by the continuation of strong collaboration across the SARA community on behalf of the learners served at the more than 2,400 institutions of higher education that participate in SARA. From the policy improvements designed to advance student consumer protections, to the development of NC-SARA's next strategic plan, to the improved administrative support and systems— none of this would be possible without all of our constituents working together.

In this year's Annual Report, you will read about some of the specific collective efforts of SARA's members, regional education compacts, and participating institutions to continue to support student access to interstate postsecondary distance education. NC-SARA is proud to showcase this work and mark its development across one more year.

Finally, as we approach the next year ahead together, we are excited to continue leveraging our collective strength to best serve our postsecondary education learners.

Sincerely,

Marianne Boeke, Ph.D.
President
NC-SARA

ABOUT NC-SARA AND SARA

NC-SARA

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a private nonprofit **organization** [501(c)(3)] that coordinates the implementation of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) in collaboration with the four regional, interstate education compacts:

- Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC)
- New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE)
- Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)
- Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)

NC-SARA supports the regional education compacts and states as they implement the agreement and carry out their SARA-related work. Additionally, NC-SARA facilitates information exchange among the regional education compacts, member states, territories, the District of Columbia, and SARA institutions regarding participation and compliance.

SARA

The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) is a voluntary **agreement** among member states, districts, and territories that establishes standards for the reciprocal authorization of institutions providing distance education across state lines. As of 2026, 49 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have voluntarily joined SARA. More than 2,400 institutions have received approval from their home state to participate in the agreement.

"SARA MEMBER STATES" IS DEFINED IN THE *SARA POLICY MANUAL* AS ANY STATE, DISTRICT, OR TERRITORY THAT HAS JOINED SARA.

TOGETHER, NC-SARA AND ITS PARTNERS WORK TO:

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

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

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

SARA POLICY IMPROVEMENTS FOR ADVANCING STUDENT PROTECTION

2026 SARA SPOTLIGHT

Teach-Out Plans and Provisional Status Disclosures

Colleges and universities must meet certain requirements to participate in SARA, many of which are focused on ensuring appropriate consumer protections for students. Over the past several years, the state-led process has resulted in revised SARA policies in order to strengthen these protections.

The 2025 SARA Policy Modification Process resulted in two notable revisions toward this end, focused on advancing protections to students in the unfortunate event of an institution's closure.

These two revisions—which are effective July 1, 2026—help ensure transparency and appropriate coordination across agencies in order to prevent harm to students. They also collectively represent the value and efficacy of the SARA Policy Modification Process in ensuring stakeholder proposals are considered on behalf of student consumer protection.

SARA POLICY IMPROVEMENTS

Institutions Must Submit Teach-Out Plans to States:
A SARA-participating institution that is required to submit an institutional teach-out plan or similar with an accrediting agency, authorizing entity, or the U.S. Department of Education shall simultaneously provide a copy to its SARA State Portal Entity.

Institutions placed on SARA provisional status
will be required to disclose this status on the institution's website, including the reason.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR NC-SARA'S 2027-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

2026 SARA SPOTLIGHT

NC-SARA's leadership focused extensive time in 2025 to reflect on its previous strategic plan and engage stakeholders in the development of the next strategic plan. With more than 2,400 institutions across 49 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia, this engagement process has been integral to the development of a future path for NC-SARA and its constituents.

In 2025, the NC-SARA Board Strategy Committee:

- Analyzed current higher education trends
- Reviewed the Mission Statement and Core Work of NC-SARA
- Reviewed how we describe SARA and NC-SARA
- Surveyed 5 constituent groups:
  - —NC-SARA Board
  - —Regional Education Compact SARA Staff
  - —SARA State Portal Entity Staff
  - —SARA-Participating Institution Staff
  - —NC-SARA Staff
- Held listening sessions with NC-SARA staff, SARA State Portal Entity staff, regional education compact SARA staff, and the NC-SARA Board.

Based on the feedback gathered from the surveys and listening sessions, NC-SARA has identified core priority areas that will soon begin to take shape in the next strategic plan.

1. Policy, Regulation, and Consumer Protection: Monitoring the shifting federal and state regulatory horizons, providing clear and transparent compliance tracking, and facilitating the collaborative, state-led SARA Policy Modification Process (PMP).

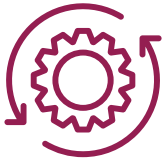
2. Research, Planning, and Data Analytics: Exercising diligent oversight of the annual SARA data reporting, student complaints tracking, and metric-driven data dashboards that empirically demonstrate the value and national impact of SARA.

2027-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN (CONTINUED)

2026 SARA SPOTLIGHT

3. Strategic Communications and Engagement: Designing narratives that articulate SARA's value; cultivating stakeholder networks through virtual and in-person convenings; and cultivating robust inter-organizational relationships through onboarding programs, high-impact training resources, and structured stakeholder workshops and webinars.

4. Technology and Architectural Strategy: Building, protecting, and automating the SARA Portal and electronic form submission pipelines—necessary to reduce administrative burden and optimize user experiences for regional education compacts, states, and institutions.



5. NC-SARA's Internal Operations: Ensuring robust internal infrastructure, fiscal accountability, resource optimization, and workplace culture development.

The development and rollout of NC-SARA's 2027–2030 Strategic Plan will follow a structured timeline focused on thoughtful input and phased implementation.

Visit the NC-SARA Strategic Plan webpage for more information.

LEADERSHIP:
THE NC-SARA BOARD

Learn about the essential leaders that make SARA work

NC-SARA's Board of Directors is comprised of the presidents of the four regional education compacts and leaders across SARA member states, institutions, accreditors, and other higher education organizations and associations. Together, these individuals ensure the varying perspectives of SARA stakeholder groups are represented in the board's work to advance the organization's mission. Notably, the majority of board members represent states' interests.

Five board committees are in place to support the governance of NC-SARA:

1. NC-SARA Executive Committee
In collaboration with the NC-SARA Board of Directors, the Executive Committee provides support and guidance to the NC-SARA President, ensuring effective implementation of the organization's goals.

2. NC-SARA Finance Committee
The Finance Committee oversees and provides guidance on all financial activity at NC-SARA, ensuring fulfillment of the fiduciary responsibilities foundational to the organization's operations.

3. NC-SARA Governance & Nominations Committee
The Governance and Nominations Committee manages organizational governance maintaining the structure and membership of NC-SARA's board.

4. NC-SARA Consumer Protection & Policy Committee
The Consumer Protection and Policy Committee serves as policy experts for NC-SARA's board. Committee members ensure regulatory compliance on all levels by keeping the board informed of policy developments to enable proactive response.

5. NC-SARA Strategy Committee
The Strategy Committee aligns NC-SARA's long-term goals with the dynamic landscape of higher education, federal, and state policy. They ensure the organization effectively implements these strategies to advance its mission.

Learn more about the individuals that make up the leadership on the NC-SARA Board by visiting NC-SARA's website.

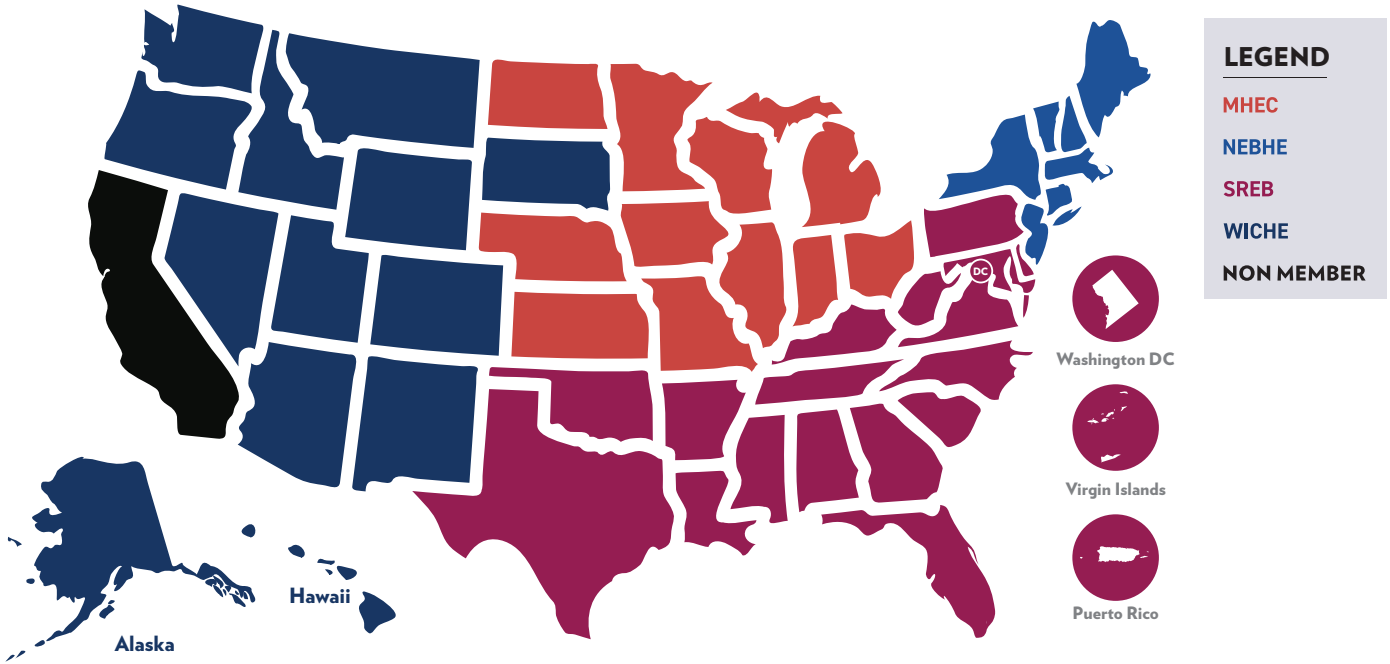
LEADERSHIP: NC-SARA STAFF & REGIONAL EDUCATION COMPACTS

Learn about the staff and partners who help make SARA work

The staff at NC-SARA are talented individuals who bring a diverse range of skills, experiences, and perspectives to our organization. With the right people in the right roles, we advance our mission and core work in support of students, institutions, states, and our compact partners. Learn more about the individuals who make up NC-SARA's staff on our website.

Regional Education Compacts

The four regional education compacts provide on-the-ground assistance to and oversight of the states in their respective regions. Each compact's president serves on the NC-SARA Board, and each compact has staff devoted to supporting SARA and leading the shared work of SARA implementation.



NC-SARA'S REGIONAL EDUCATION COMPACT PARTNERS

MIDWESTERN HIGHER EDUCATION COMPACT (MHEC)

Susan Heegaard, President

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) brings together leaders from Midwestern states to strengthen post-secondary education, advance student success, and promote regional economic vitality. MHEC contracts, programs, and initiatives save member states and students millions of dollars annually through time- and cost-savings opportunities. MHEC research and convenings generate ideas and policies that support workforce readiness and improve the quality, accessibility, and affordability of postsecondary education. As the compact serving the midwestern region, MHEC is responsible for coordinating the participation of SARA member states in the midwestern region through the MHEC State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (M-SARA). As of January 1, 2026, eleven states are participating in M-SARA.

NEW ENGLAND BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION (NEBHE)

Michael Thomas, President and CEO

The New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) advances equitable postsecondary outcomes through convening, research, and programs for students, institution leaders, and policymakers. Its vision is that everyone in New England will have lifelong access to affordable, high-value postsecondary education. As the compact serving the northeast region, NEBHE is responsible for coordinating the participation of SARA member states in New England through the NEBHE State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (N-SARA). As of January 1, 2026, eight states are participating in N-SARA.

SOUTHERN REGIONAL EDUCATION BOARD (SREB)

Valerie Greenhill, President

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) works with states to improve education at every level, from early childhood through doctoral education and the workforce. SREB guides and supports states as they advance all levels of education to improve the economic vitality of the SREB region. As the compact serving the southern region, SREB is responsible for coordinating the participation of SARA member states in the southern region through the SREB State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (S-SARA). As of January 1, 2026, seventeen states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are participating in S-SARA.

WESTERN INTERSTATE COMMISSION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (WICHE)

Demarée Michelau, President

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) is a regional interstate higher education compact that works collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all residents of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life. As the compact serving the West, WICHE is responsible for coordinating the participation of SARA-member states in the region through the WICHE State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (W-SARA). As of January 1, 2026, thirteen Western states are participating in W-SARA.

NC-SARA'S STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Engagement at every level

STUDENTS

SARA is focused on serving 21st-century learners by providing access to 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 important requirements to help ensure a quality learning experience.

REGIONAL EDUCATION COMPACTS

Our work with the regional education 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.

INSTITUTIONS

NC-SARA supports more than 2,400 institutions that participate in SARA through communications, helpful resources, and regular engagement with SARA member states and regional compacts.

STATES

NC-SARA regularly works with state regulators, SPEs, and policymakers responsible for overseeing distance education in postsecondary institutions. Continuing to engage with the states remains a top priority.

STUDENT CONSUMER PROTECTION GROUPS

NC-SARA shares a commitment to student consumer protections that will continue to provide a strong foundation for future collaboration.

ACCREDITORS

NC-SARA recognizes and supports the value that accreditors provide to the public regarding distance education quality assurance. The SARA community relies on institutional and specialized/programmatic accreditors to support quality, and we regularly identify opportunities to seek their partnership and guidance on a variety of initiatives.

HIGHER EDUCATION AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

NC-SARA maintains relationships with many higher education agencies and organizations that work on behalf of students, institutions, and states, including several that are focused specifically on distance education.

BY THE NUMBERS

Our reach, impact, and scale

STATES

52
voluntary members of SARA, comprising states, territories, and the District of Columbia

100+
SARA State Portal Entity staff administer SARA across the member states

INSTITUTIONS

2,400+
institutions participate in SARA

48%
of SARA-participating institutions are public; 43% are private nonprofit; 8% are private for-profit; 12 tribal colleges

STUDENTS

546,621
students from SARA-participating institutions participated in out-of-state learning placements in 2025

1,722,640
students attended out-of-state SARA-participating institutions exclusively via distance education through SARA in Fall 2025. This excludes students from CA and other non-SARA members, as well as students attending an institution in state

SARA POLICY MODIFICATION PROPOSALS

9
SARA policy modification proposals were approved in October 2025

33
policy modification proposals were submitted in the 2026 cycle of the SARA Policy Modification Process

REGIONAL COMPACTS & REGIONAL STEERING COMMITTEES

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

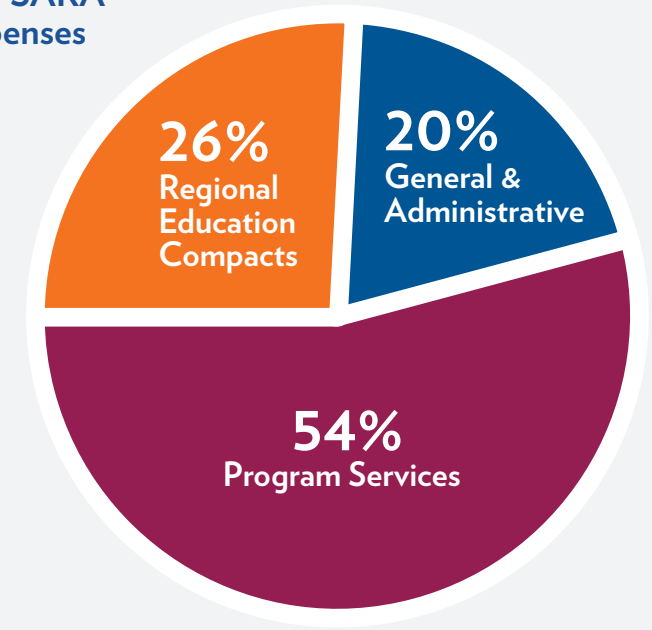
65+
people participate in SARA regional steering committees nationally

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Our work is made possible by annual fees paid by institutions that voluntarily participate in SARA.

NC-SARA's total revenue was approximately $8.3 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.

NC-SARA Expenses



Regional Education Compacts

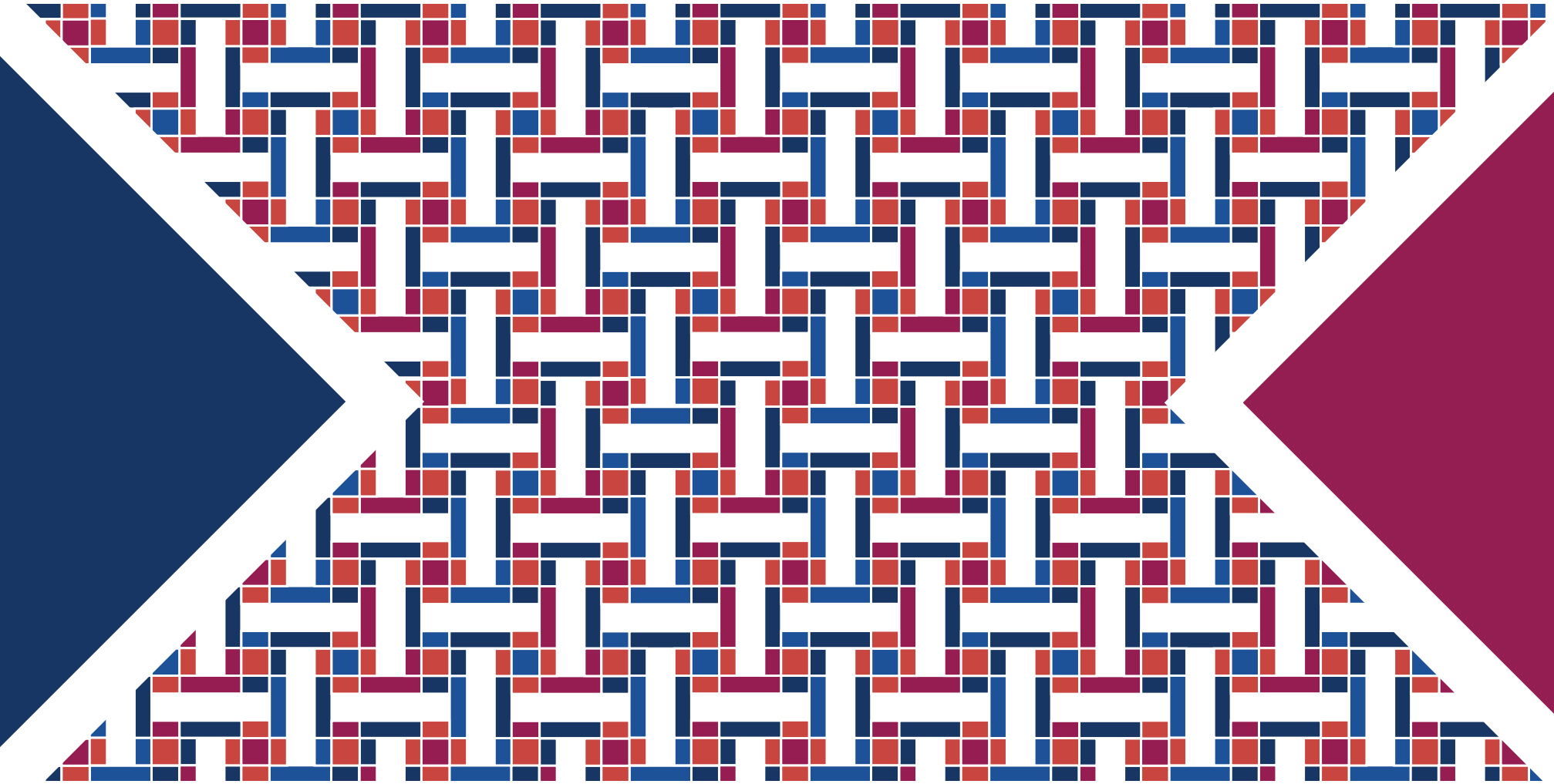
- Supports the on-the-ground efforts of the four regional education compacts as they administer SARA in their regions and engage with member states and participating institutions. Funding also provides compacts with resources to support SARA-dedicated staff.

Program Services

- Funds state and territory grants.
- Supports educational programming and training for SARA State Portal Entities and SARA-participating institutions.
- Supports research, data collection, and data reporting efforts.
- Funds NC-SARA's engagement with higher education and distance learning stakeholders through conferences and webinars.

General and Administrative

- Funds communications activities and general administration of NC-SARA.
- Funds resource development and maintenance, such as the State Authorization Guide and Professional Licensure Directory.



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