

GUIDELINES

Below are the guidelines and instructions for the fiscal year 2025 State Higher Education Finance (SHEF) data collection. **The full SHEF (including Grapevine) survey is due on Friday, December 5, 2025.**

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- **Survey years:** Years in the survey refer to your state’s fiscal year. For example, 2025 refers to the fiscal year that ends in 2025. Please pay careful attention to the years in which you enter data. The first four sections include fiscal year 2026 (for Grapevine), the rest do not.
- **Pop-up data definitions:** If you place your cursor on a data element name for a few seconds, a pop-up box will appear with additional guidance. [Click here to view all data definitions.](#)
- **Survey data collection template:** If you need to survey institutions or other agencies in your state to collect some or all data elements in your state, you can use an Excel template of the SHEF data collection to survey other entities. [Click here to download a template of the SHEF data collection.](#)
- **Required data elements:** Asterisks indicate which fields are required. If a data element does not apply to your agency or you are unable to provide data that should be reported, please follow the “Missing data vs. zeros” instructions below.
- **Missing data vs. zeros:** As of 2020, we now differentiate between a true zero and a blank. A zero indicates that you have access to the data but have nothing to report (such as a state without performance funding), while a blank indicates that you are currently not able to provide the data element (such as a state with performance funding where sector-level data are not available). **Please review your entire submission and ensure that zeros and blanks are correct.**
 - In some cases, the new data verification tool flags missing data and zeros as issues. As indicated in the issue note, please use the appropriate comment box(es) to address flagged blanks and zeros.
 - Please note: These flags cannot be removed from the data verification Excel file even after being addressed in the comment box. Once you have made a comment about these flagged issues that can only be addressed by making a comment, you can ignore them on your data verification sheet moving forward.
- **Saving your data:** To save the data you have entered, whether complete or still in progress, you will need to use the save button. The option to save is located at the end of each survey section. We recommend that you use the save button available under each individual section as you report data to ensure that you do not lose any entered data due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g., interrupted internet connection, power outage, leaving the survey idle for too long).

- **Grapevine and SHEF data verification:** The data collection website includes a built-in verification tool. Prior to submitting your data, you should resolve any data verification issues. To ensure you can catch and resolve any data issues or data elements that require explanation in the comments, you must run a verification report.
 - There are two data verification buttons in the online survey. The first “Run Data Verification (Sections 1-4)” button is located below Section 4. This will download an Excel file with a list of data validation issues (e.g., large changes or blanks needing comments, unequal sources and uses of total state support, etc.).
 - The other “Run Data Verification” button is located at the bottom of the survey entry page. Please address any verification issues that cannot be resolved in the comments (e.g., suspension of PBF program in which data were reported in the year prior).
 - Once any issues or errors have been resolved through a data change or comment, please mark your data collection as complete for both Sections 1-4 (Grapevine) and the full SHEF survey.
- **Indicating the survey is complete:** When you have finished filling out the survey, run a data verification as described above. After you have corrected all data verification issues, please check the related box indicating you are finished. Checking this box will help us measure your progress and will tell us that your data submission is complete. Once you have marked your survey as complete, SHEEO will run additional data validations to check for other abnormalities if they still exist in your reported data. While we hope the data verification tool will reduce the number of revisions and questions after the submission deadline, we will follow up with an email for clarifications and potential revisions as necessary.
- **Locking your data:** Locking your data is a final step to confirm that your data have been thoroughly reviewed and are ready for publication. **Do not lock your data** until you have 1) reviewed the initial tables we will send you in January for Grapevine and February for SHEF, and 2) verified that no changes are needed.
- **Continuity in data:** Consistency from year to year is very important. If there is a substantial change in the methods you use to compile your data, we ask that you update prior-year data using the new methodology to maintain consistency in the trend data. To change data for years not shown on the survey, update this [Excel file](#) and email it to Rachel Burns at rburns@sheeo.org.
- **Calculations:** Please fill out the collection form as completely as possible and leave any calculations to us (e.g., do not subtract RAM or state public aid before entering tax appropriations; include it, and enter that figure in the appropriate section).
- **Estimating:** If you are unable to provide actual figures but can provide an estimate, please do so and indicate which figures are estimates by adding a comment. Please provide as much detail as possible to ensure we correctly note which data elements and years are estimates in the corresponding table and figure footnotes.
- **Negative numbers:** Do not enter any negative numbers. All data elements should be reported as positive values; we will subtract when necessary to create a calculated field.

- **Decimals and symbols:** The data entry form will not allow you to save decimals or dollar signs. You will need to remove any dollar signs and round decimals to the nearest dollar prior to entering your data.
- **Subtotals and breakouts:** In several places, we ask you to provide a breakout of calculated or reported variables. Please pay special attention to these breakouts and be sure their totals match the corresponding fields.
- **Comments:** Comment fields should be used to describe the following instances: verification issues that need to be explained; required data are not available and an estimate is used instead of the actual value; a change in methodology or data availability that impacts your data collection; large changes in funding amounts (for example, an explanation for a large increase in state financial aid); discrepancies in reporting across years or between sectors; and any other footnotes you want us to include in our final reports.

Thank you for all that you do to make the annual SHEF data collection possible! The final datasets and reports resulting from your efforts are valuable tools for many researchers, policymakers, analysts, and reporters.