

**Strategic Transformation Planning Summary**  
**Tri-C Board of Trustees Listening Session**  
**March 4, 2025**

This report provides an assessment of the key themes and challenges identified during the Tri-C Board of Trustees strategic transformation planning dialogue. The Board made it clear that while Tri-C has strong foundations, there are areas that require immediate and strategic action to maintain relevance and effectiveness in a rapidly changing educational and economic landscape.

**Challenges and Areas for Improvement**

Board members were direct in identifying pressing concerns. The most urgent include the need to expand employer partnerships, align academic offerings with real-world job demands, and adapt to the economic and demographic shifts affecting Northeast Ohio. Workforce readiness and job placement must move from being aspirational goals to measurable outcomes. Simply preparing students is not enough—Tri-C must ensure that its graduates are securing meaningful employment. One Board member noted, *“We can’t just graduate students and hope they find jobs. We need to be actively ensuring placement and tracking their success post-graduation.”*

The expansion of bachelor’s degree programs was a key area of discussion. While there is strong support for offering more four-year degrees, the institution must be strategic in selecting programs that will drive enrollment growth and directly respond to workforce needs. Another Board member emphasized, *“We need to be intentional about which bachelor’s programs we offer. If they don’t translate into real career opportunities, we’re not solving the right problem.”* Partnerships with businesses must go beyond surface-level collaborations to become deeply integrated, ensuring curriculum development is aligned with the skills employers demand.

Declining regional population and shrinking enrollment numbers present a serious threat to Tri-C’s sustainability. Without aggressive recruitment strategies and targeted program diversification, the institution risks falling behind more adaptive competitors. Addressing declining perceptions of higher education, particularly community colleges, must be a priority. The Board recognized that political and economic factors are shifting public sentiment, and Tri-C must be proactive in demonstrating its value proposition. One participant warned, *“The competition isn’t just from other colleges anymore—it’s from skepticism about higher education itself.”*

## **Institutional Strengths and Differentiators**

Despite these challenges, the Board reaffirmed that Tri-C's affordability, accessibility, and workforce-centered approach remain powerful advantages. The lowest tuition in Ohio continues to make Tri-C an attractive option, but affordability alone is not enough. Students must see a clear return on investment, which means increased job placement efforts, stronger alumni engagement, and enhanced employer connections. One trustee pointed out, *"Our tuition is low, but if students don't see a direct path to a job, they'll choose another route."*

The institution's multiple campuses and flexible scheduling remain strong assets, but they must be leveraged more effectively to reach new student demographics. The Board also underscored the importance of wraparound student support services, including 24/7 tutoring, mentoring, and career coaching, as critical components of student retention and success. A Board member emphasized, *"Support services are what make the difference for many of our students—if we fail to invest in them, we fail our mission."*

## **Workforce Readiness: A Call for Accountability**

The Board made it clear that preparing students for today's job market requires more than just theoretical instruction. Critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability are essential, but without real-world application, these skills lose their impact. Faculty must be more engaged with industry trends, and students should have access to experiential learning opportunities that go beyond traditional classroom instruction. One Board member stated, *"If our faculty aren't connected to what's happening in the real world, how can we expect our students to be?"*

The rapid advancement of AI and automation presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The Board emphasized that Tri-C must ensure students are technologically fluent and prepared for shifts in workforce demands. AI literacy should be embedded across disciplines, not treated as an optional specialization. One participant remarked, *"AI isn't coming—it's here. If our students don't learn how to work with it, they'll be left behind."*

## **Institutional Values and Future Directions**

Innovation, inclusivity, and adaptability must drive Tri-C's future. However, the Board cautioned against vague commitments to these values without clear implementation strategies. Institutional flexibility must be backed by decisive action, whether through expanding employer collaborations, streamlining bureaucracy, or rethinking traditional educational models.

Academic excellence and financial accessibility remain non-negotiables, but they must be coupled with a stronger institutional identity. Tri-C must be more aggressive in promoting its value, not just to prospective students but also to businesses, policymakers, and the community at large. Leveraging subject matter experts, modernizing teaching methodologies, and increasing engagement with industry leaders will be critical. As one trustee put it, *“If we don’t tell our story, someone else will—and it may not be the one we want.”*

### **A Call to Action**

The Board envisions Tri-C as a leader in Northeast Ohio’s economic and workforce development, but achieving this vision requires bold, immediate action. Strengthening career pathways and employer engagement must be a top priority. Wraparound student services should be expanded and refined to improve retention and graduation rates.

Short-term, career-driven training programs need to be scaled up to meet employer demands, providing students with a direct pipeline to jobs. Additionally, AI and technological advancements should not be viewed as future considerations—they must be integrated into Tri-C’s strategic plan now. One Board member urged, *“We have to be ahead of the curve, not playing catch-up.”*

### **Conclusion**

The Board’s message is clear: Tri-C is at a crossroads, where bold leadership and decisive action will determine its future impact on education and workforce development. Incremental changes will not suffice—what is needed is a proactive and strategic commitment to innovation and adaptability. The institution must take charge of shaping the workforce landscape, forging stronger employer partnerships, and ensuring that student success is not just a goal but a measurable outcome. By embracing change and aligning its programs with the demands of the modern economy, Tri-C can solidify its role as an indispensable force in Northeast Ohio’s economic and educational ecosystem. However, realizing this vision demands more than incremental progress—it requires bold action, unwavering commitment, and a willingness to challenge conventional approaches. The institution must not only adapt to change but lead it, ensuring that every initiative tangibly improves student success and strengthens the regional economy. The path forward is clear: embrace innovation, cultivate deep employer partnerships, and make strategic decisions that position Tri-C as an indispensable asset to Northeast Ohio’s workforce and future prosperity.