

Strategic Transformation Planning Summary

All Stakeholder Listening Sessions

(February 17 – April 9, 2025)

Introduction

Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) is entering a time of reflection and reinvention. As the landscape of higher education shifts rapidly due to evolving workforce demands, societal needs, and technological transformation, Tri-C recognizes the urgent need to not only adapt but lead with purpose. To guide this work, the College convened 22 listening sessions with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders—including faculty, staff, students, managers, alumni, trustees, the Tri-C Foundation Board, community partners, the Tri-C Board of Visitors and members of the interfaith community.

These conversations were not just about collecting feedback, they also served as something of a gauge of our readiness for change. The findings revealed both the challenges and aspirations. Across every group, there was a call for bold thinking and deeper accountability, for equity and community impact, and for a new way of educating that builds lifelong value. Participants shared honest critiques, fresh ideas, and shared ownership for what comes next.

This report reflects five overarching themes that emerged with an additional crosscutting theme that showed up within nearly all the listening session prompts. It offers not only an analysis of current realities, but quotes from participants (in red text) that championed certain strategies and offered a vision for a more agile, inclusive, and innovative institution.

1. Embracing Transformational Change and Agility

Faculty and Staff Perspective: Faculty and staff repeatedly underscored the need to adapt to fast-paced societal and technological change. As one faculty member warned, “We seem to be moving away from the vision of teaching and adding more management layers.” Others echoed this sentiment, with one stating, “Faculty feel disenfranchised—we need to rebuild a culture of trust where change isn’t happening just for the sake of change.” Staff members highlighted a need for simplification: “Change is important, but we need to

be more nimble in our systems and decision-making.” Many also advocated embedding skills-based learning into every academic program. One staff member said, “We should build flexible and adaptable programming that responds to workforce demands and includes skills certification.” Together, they called for systems that empower frontline innovation and support students with career-relevant competencies.

Managers' Perspective: Managers viewed change as both a challenge and an opportunity. “We have to figure things out now in order to progress and transform how we serve our students,” said one. Another manager shared concern over current institutional structures: “It’s hard to move the entire College as fast as the world is moving.” They encouraged prioritizing outcomes, not processes. “We are at a once-in-a-generation opportunity to define our future,” a manager noted, calling for a bold and responsive strategic framework. Managers also supported a renewed focus on aligning programs with employer needs and embedding verified skills attainment into degrees.

Students' Perspective: Students expressed growing awareness that higher education must change to remain relevant. “Education is changing, and we need to be aware as students,” one participant emphasized. Another noted, “Proper planning promotes perfect performance,” highlighting the value of intentional design in student programming. Students supported efforts to tie education to future success: “We don’t want to do it now, but we have to.” They were especially interested in career and technology trends and advocated for preparation in areas like AI and time management. Many welcomed the idea of skills certifications that validate learning beyond traditional grades.

External Stakeholders' Perspective: Community leaders, board members, and alumni pressed Tri-C to lead rather than follow. “Adapt now or be left behind,” was a refrain from several participants. A board member reflected, “Tri-C must define its own direction and not let it be defined by outside pressures.” Employers and partners also called for education that reflects changing labor markets: “Programs must link directly to sustainable careers.” One advisor summarized the challenge succinctly: “The future is now. We must be ready to pivot and act with vision.” External voices championed embedding a skills proficiency framework to help Tri-C stand out as an entrepreneurial leader.

Strategic Implications: Listening session participants encouraged the College to explore ways of becoming more nimble and responsive in both structure and programming. There is broad interest in examining how Tri-C might reduce internal barriers to innovation, strengthen responsiveness to labor market shifts, and integrate emerging technologies such as AI across disciplines. Several stakeholders suggested the College consider embedding demonstrable skill attainment—such as credentials, certifications, or project portfolios—into academic programs, where appropriate. These ideas point to a desire for

Tri-C to evolve as a more flexible, future-facing institution that adapts with intentionality and clarity.

2. Holistic Belonging and Student Success

Faculty and Staff Perspective: Faculty and staff consistently emphasized the importance of supporting students holistically. One staff member shared, “Support the whole student, not just academic goals.” Another added, “Truly show that the institution values ALL people regardless of title, age, or anything else.” Faculty expressed the need for targeted efforts to improve retention and outcomes among underrepresented groups: “Retention is the real test of our values in action.” They also highlighted that embedding equity into curriculum and support services must be institutionalized, not episodic. “Wraparound services shouldn’t be the exception—they should be the standard,” one faculty member concluded.

Managers' Perspective: Managers stressed system-wide accountability and the use of disaggregated data to assess impact. “Equity must be tracked and improved across all departments, not just in isolated offices,” said one manager. Others proposed embedding DEI into hiring practices and leadership training: “We need to develop leadership that reflects our students.” There was a strong call for alignment between resource allocation and equitable outcomes. “If our values include equity, then our budgets must reflect that,” a manager observed. Managers also favored skill-building programming that supports long-term student agency and self-advocacy.

Students' Perspective: Students expressed deep appreciation for Tri-C’s student services. “They genuinely care about your personal life,” said one, referencing the availability of counseling, food pantries, and emergency assistance. Another shared, “I can go to counseling about personal conversations and not just for academics, which helps me focus on school.” Students emphasized that basic needs must be met before learning can occur. “Sometimes I need help with life more than I need help with class,” one student said candidly. Many called for more visibility and access to these services as part of a truly inclusive environment.

External Stakeholders' Perspective: Community and interfaith leaders focused on the importance of cultural representation and inclusion. “Our community needs to see themselves reflected in Tri-C,” one leader stated. Another emphasized, “It’s not enough to say you support diversity—you have to show it in your programs, people, and policies.” Trustees called for institutional clarity on equity goals and outcomes. “We need to know where we stand—and where we’re going—on equity,” said a board member. External

partners urged Tri-C to think long-term: “Student success doesn’t stop at graduation. Lifelong support must be part of the value we offer.”

Strategic Implications: Stakeholders urged Tri-C to consider reinforcing its commitment to equity and student-centered design across the student experience. Many voiced support for expanding and normalizing access to mental health and basic needs resources and for ensuring that inclusivity is reflected not only in programs but also in leadership and policies. A number of contributors recommended embedding DEI goals throughout strategic initiatives and aligning budgets with those values. These reflections suggest that Tri-C may wish to explore more intentional ways of delivering holistic, identity-affirming support, particularly for underserved and non-traditional students, while also considering the broader role it could play across the learner's life cycle.

3. Innovative, Future-Ready Learning Models

Faculty and Staff Perspective: Faculty and staff voiced strong support for integrating real-world, project-based learning, along with ethical use of emerging technologies like AI. “We need to teach students how to determine when AI is wrong,” one faculty member stated. Another emphasized, “Students need to be able to bring their skills to meet employers’ needs while also advocating for themselves professionally.” Faculty proposed embedding skills credentials into existing coursework to align with industry standards. One faculty member shared, “We should demonstrate student learning with tangible, real-world evidence, not just tests.” Staff echoed the need to evolve traditional instruction: “Encourage outside-of-the-norm educational models and faster adaptability in curriculum.” Collectively, they see future-ready learning as a bridge between innovation and student empowerment.

Managers' Perspective: Managers promoted learning models that adapt to shifting workforce demands and deliver high-impact, flexible programming. “Students need to bring their skills to meet employers’ needs,” said one manager, emphasizing outcomes over course completion. Another manager added, “Allow for more flexibility and faster adaptability in programming, credentialing, and scheduling.” Managers also advocated for personalized learning pathways powered by data and AI. One stated, “We have to reimagine what serving the community means in a modern era—flexible, connected, and practical.” They emphasized that Tri-C’s ability to quickly adapt will determine its relevance moving forward.

Students’ Perspective: Students expressed enthusiasm for a more career-connected, personalized learning experience. “Communication skills along with tech skills are very

important,” one student shared. Another added, “I want to know how what I’m learning applies to a real job.” Students were especially interested in internships and experiential learning: “Hands-on opportunities give us the confidence to step into the workforce.” They also appreciated learning environments that feel current and engaging: “Keep moving with the new tech we’re required to know.” The consensus was pretty clear—students want education that prepares them for the real world.

External Stakeholders’ Perspective: Employers, alumni, and board members pushed for an innovation-forward curriculum that connects learning to economic opportunity. “Create experiential opportunities in career fields,” advised one Board of Visitors member. An alumnus noted, “We want to keep learning with Tri-C long after graduation—lifelong upskilling is critical.” Another external leader emphasized, “We need programs that evolve as the job market evolves.” Stakeholders also supported embedding skills verification into degrees: “Certifications, micro-credentials, and project portfolios give our graduates a competitive edge.” They see Tri-C’s innovation potential as a community and workforce development catalyst.

Strategic Implications: Many stakeholders encouraged Tri-C to consider developing modular and adaptable learning structures that reflect the growing demand for career-relevant education. Suggestions included increasing access to micro-credentials, integrating employer-validated skills verification, and expanding experiential learning opportunities such as internships and project-based assignments. Several emphasized that students would benefit from clearer connections between classroom learning and real-world applications, especially in emerging fields like AI. There was also a strong interest in reimagining the curriculum as a more personalized and iterative experience. These insights may point toward opportunities for Tri-C to further define and design education models that are relevant, stackable, and directly connected to economic opportunity.

4. Authentic Partnerships and Community Impact

Faculty and Staff Perspective: Faculty and staff described Tri-C as a vital “community anchor” and emphasized the need to expand community-based learning. “We must build the future along with the community,” said a staff member, underscoring the desire for authentic collaboration rather than one-directional outreach. Faculty called for expanded opportunities in service learning, civic engagement, and partnerships with local nonprofits. “Let students learn while they serve,” one faculty member urged. Others highlighted the importance of creating structured alumni mentorship programs that tie past student

success to current learners: “Alumni stories are powerful tools of connection and inspiration.” Faculty and staff envision a Tri-C that contributes tangibly to local progress while inviting the community to co-create educational solutions.

Managers' Perspective: Managers highlighted the potential of cross-sector collaborations that address regional economic and social challenges. “We need to become the go-to partner for solving regional workforce needs,” one manager stated. Another observed, “Our curriculum must reflect local realities—industry, housing, education, healthcare—everything that makes up a thriving community.” Managers see value in strategic partnerships with municipalities and employers to co-design programs that boost employment outcomes and social mobility. “There’s no transformation without collaboration,” a manager affirmed. They also proposed developing interdisciplinary models rooted in real-world issues that engage students with the broader community.

Students' Perspective: Students expressed appreciation for initiatives that bring Tri-C into the neighborhoods where they live and work. “Events on campus help, but connecting with our communities where they are is even better,” said one student. Others praised community-oriented programs like job shadowing, cultural events, and volunteerism. “We learn more when we see how school connects to the real world,” one student emphasized. Many suggested expanding mentoring and internship opportunities in local businesses and nonprofits: “Show us what’s possible here, not just somewhere else.” Students value belonging and see community engagement as a pathway to relevance and empowerment.

External Stakeholders' Perspective: External stakeholders—including trustees, board members, and community leaders—emphasized that Tri-C must lead the region’s efforts toward equity, education, and economic revitalization. “Tri-C was founded by the community; now it must lead it,” a Trustee reflected. A Foundation Board member added, “Lifelong learning is a community asset, and Tri-C must be its steward.” Others urged the College to expand its physical and digital footprint to reach underserved areas: “Take the campus to the community,” said one advisor. Stakeholders also encouraged Tri-C to serve as a convener and connector across institutions, employers, and neighborhoods. “No one else is as well-positioned as Tri-C to unite education and workforce goals.”

Strategic Implications: Participants across stakeholder groups expressed a clear interest in seeing Tri-C deepen its role as a community-centered institution. Suggestions ranged from creating local advisory councils and alumni mentorship programs to expanding civic engagement opportunities and co-designing regional solutions with public and private partners. Many contributors described the College as a natural convener and expressed hope that it could more actively serve as a bridge between education, employment, and

community wellbeing. These ideas invite Tri-C to consider ways to strengthen its visibility, accessibility, and collaborative presence in the neighborhoods and regions it serves.

5. Empowered Culture; Clear Communication; Bold Leadership

Faculty and Staff Perspective: Faculty and staff emphasized the importance of inclusive leadership and clear communication in building institutional trust. “Let change happen through us, not to us,” one faculty member emphasized, expressing a desire for shared governance and participatory decision-making. Another shared, “There’s too much top-down leadership—we need to hear from those doing the work every day.” Staff pointed to a disconnect between strategic decisions and frontline realities: “Leadership must spend more time listening before deciding.” Additionally, they advocated for a culture of empowerment that promotes innovation: “Give people the room and trust to lead from where they are.” Their vision of culture is rooted in mutual respect, transparency, and two-way communication.

Managers' Perspective: Managers called for streamlined governance and more open dialogue across the College. “We need systems of communication that actually connect people, not just push information,” said one. They emphasized the importance of interdepartmental collaboration: “Feedback loops are key to sustainable transformation.” Managers also supported leadership pipelines that identify and nurture talent from within Tri-C. “Let’s build our leaders instead of constantly hiring externally,” one proposed. There was a shared belief that when people see a clear path forward, they will invest more deeply in the College’s mission and future.

Students' Perspective: Students acknowledged the College’s efforts to involve them through advisory boards and leadership groups, but felt communication could be more consistent and student-centered. “Sometimes we find things out too late—like policy changes that affect us,” said one student. Another noted, “We want a voice, not just a seat at the table.” Students emphasized that strong communication builds community and retention: “When students feel included, they stay engaged.” They also expressed interest in peer leadership opportunities and more transparency around decision-making processes that impact student life.

External Stakeholders' Perspective: External stakeholders stressed that leadership clarity and culture alignment are essential for external credibility and community trust. “People need to see a clear direction—and their place in it,” said a Foundation Board member. Community partners echoed this call, noting, “Culture starts with communication—and that includes listening.” Board members urged leaders to be visible

and accountable: “Leadership should reflect the community it serves and be present in the spaces where decisions matter.” They also emphasized the need for transparency in strategic planning and budgeting processes.

Strategic Implications: Throughout the listening sessions, stakeholders emphasized the importance of transparency, trust-building, and inclusive communication. Some called for Tri-C to reflect on its internal leadership pipelines and explore more participatory governance structures that draw on the insight of faculty, staff, and students. Others recommended the development of communication systems that foster clarity and two-way dialogue. These ideas suggest an opportunity for the College to consider strengthening its internal culture as a foundation for institutional alignment, collaboration, and sustainable transformation. A unifying theme was the aspiration to see leadership at every level empowered to act with agency and clarity in service of the College’s mission.

Crosscutting Theme: Lifelong Educational Value and Skills-Based Design

Throughout the listening sessions, participants voiced a compelling vision of Tri-C as more than a traditional college—they imagined it as a continuum of opportunity. There was broad consensus that the College is increasingly being called upon to serve not just recent high school graduates, but learners across the lifespan: adult learners returning for new credentials, alumni seeking to retool for evolving industries, and community members looking for personal enrichment or digital fluency. The feedback suggested that Tri-C’s future relevance may depend on its ability to become a lifelong educational partner—offering clearly defined, stackable, and career-relevant learning experiences that extend across multiple life stages and economic realities.

Moreover, stakeholders across all groups strongly supported the intentional embedding of skills acquisition into the curriculum—both credit and non-credit—as a means of increasing employability, adaptability, and student confidence. These skills were not limited to technical training; many contributors stressed the importance of “soft” skills such as communication, teamwork, ethical use of AI, and cultural competency. There was also growing interest in modular and stackable pathways, including micro-credentials, certificates, and verified project work that align with employer expectations and workforce realities.

These themes emerged consistently across groups, reflecting a collective sense that Tri-C’s mission could be powerfully renewed by reframing it as an institution that delivers value

throughout the arc of a learner’s life—from bridge programs and dual enrollment, to post-retirement enrichment or encore career upskilling.

“We talk about how many Tri-C students want upskilling; employers increasingly look at a candidates skill portfolio.” – *Community Partner*

“We need to see Tri-C not as a stepping stone, but as a partner for life. Education shouldn’t end with a degree—it should grow with the student.” – *Community Partner*

“We’re seeing more students come back to us not because they want another degree, but because they need a new skill. Can we make those pathways faster, clearer, and more visible?” – *Staff Member*

“Lifelong learning is a community asset, and Tri-C must be its steward.” – *Foundation Board Member*

“Our curriculum should adapt as quickly as our students’ lives are changing. We need to embed skills—real ones—that they can use right away, even if they’re not chasing a degree.” – *Faculty Member*

“The people who need us most are not always looking for college—they’re looking for career momentum. We should be building education that meets them there.” – *Trustee*

These voices challenge Tri-C to reimagine itself not only as an access institution, but as an enduring partner in transformation—supporting learners in navigating life transitions, responding to workforce disruptions, and discovering new ways to contribute to their families and communities. In doing so, the College has an opportunity to unify its traditional and non-credit offerings into a cohesive, accessible, and skill-anchored educational value chain that is visible, responsive, and grounded in lived realities.

Conclusion

From the perspective of the stakeholders, Tri-C stands at a pivotal moment of reflection, responsibility, and opportunity. The language used by many participants in their responses to our listening session prompts was not limited to ideas on what Tri-C should be pursuing, rather it was a call for courage, clarity, and commitment. Participants from the College and our community shared a deep desire to see Tri-C thrive not just for today’s learners, but for generations to come.

Stakeholders felt that this is a pivotal moment for Cuyahoga Community College—one that calls not for incremental adjustments, but for thoughtful reexamination of how the College

fulfills its mission. The strategic directions outlined in this report offer a purposeful framework for advancing access, supporting student achievement, and deepening community impact.

By extending its role as a provider of lifelong learning, the College can serve individuals at every stage of their educational and professional journeys. By orienting our learning models toward emerging workforce needs Tri-C can better equip students with the skills and competencies required for long-term success in a changing labor market. And by operating with greater agility, innovation, and transparency, Tri-C can strengthen its capacity to respond to evolving community and industry needs.

The future of Tri-C will be shaped through collaborative leadership, continuous engagement, and a willingness to embrace new approaches. This report provides a foundation for that work and invites the College community to help build a more responsive and forward-looking institution.

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For any questions regarding the listening sessions or this summary, please reach out to [Gregory Stoup](#), Vice President of Institutional Progress and Effectiveness.