

Strategic Transformation Planning Summary
Tri-C Alumni Listening Session
March 6, 2025

Tri-C as a Community Anchor: Deepening Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility

The alumni listening session highlighted Tri-C's unique role as more than just a college; it is seen as a civic anchor with responsibilities that extend well beyond the classroom. Alumni emphasized that Tri-C must deepen its proactive involvement in community and civic life to remain relevant and impactful. *"We can't wait for results to happen to us; we have to make them happen through us,"* one alumnus urged.

This theme of social responsibility extended to specific calls for Tri-C to engage in human rights advocacy, voter education, and community-based problem solving. These efforts should be complemented by wraparound student supports such as housing, food assistance, day care, and mental health services. As one participant framed it: *"How do we give students that may be currently homeless hope?"*

Innovation and Adaptability: Responding to a Changing Economy and Emerging Technologies

Alumni repeatedly stressed the need for Tri-C to become more agile in adapting both its curriculum and its operational processes to align with emerging workforce demands and technological disruption. The rapid rise of artificial intelligence stood out as a particularly urgent focus. *"Sixty percent of jobs will have AI—how do you build students ready for that world?"*

This theme of responsiveness extended to how Tri-C governs itself. Alumni suggested streamlining internal processes to allow for faster updates to programs and quicker responses to industry shifts. One alumnus proposed that Tri-C adopt a *"five-month change plan"* to ensure its offerings stay current. The future of Tri-C, alumni argued, depends on its ability to be not just responsive but proactively innovative—anticipating change rather than reacting to it.

Career Development and Real-World Learning: Preparing Students for Immediate and Long-Term Success

A strong call emerged for Tri-C to expand its investment in career development, hands-on learning, and industry partnerships. Alumni want to see students graduate with not only degrees but also practical experiences, mentorship connections, and deep familiarity with real-world work environments. As one alumnus noted, *"The ATA program offers competitive certifications in a fast-paced, changing marketplace,"* illustrating how Tri-C's applied programs can provide a model for future innovation.

Alumni urged Tri-C to design programs that accommodate career changers, working adults, and returning students—offering flexible pathways and programs tailored to the realities of students balancing work, family, and education. *"How do we make a next career pathway for returning students?"* one participant asked. These flexible, career-adaptable options should become a hallmark of Tri-C's identity.

Institutional Strengths: Affordability, Accessibility, and a Student-Centered Culture

Alumni were quick to praise Tri-C for its enduring strengths: affordable tuition, accessible campuses, and a deeply student-centered culture. One alumnus reflected: *"As a student, I felt our professors showed more care and concern and were more invested in student success than any other institution I attended—including graduate school."*

Tri-C's ability to serve diverse learners across multiple campuses is a key differentiator, and its faculty and staff were frequently described as personally invested in student outcomes. Alumni saw this personalized attention as central to the college's identity and future success. Tri-C's deep community ties and strong workforce partnerships further enhance its unique value proposition.

Perception Challenges and Outreach to Future Students

Despite these strengths, alumni were also candid about Tri-C's ongoing perception challenges, particularly among younger students who may see community college as less prestigious than a four-year university. One parent recounted: *"My daughter's friend took physics at Tri-C while in high school, and it completely changed her perspective about what a community college could offer."*

Alumni strongly encouraged Tri-C to strengthen its outreach to high school students and parents, highlighting success stories and emphasizing that Tri-C offers not only an

affordable pathway to a degree, but also cutting-edge workforce programs and seamless transfer options. Alumni saw this reframing of Tri-C's brand as essential to reversing enrollment declines and enhancing the college's reputation.

A Culture of Student-Centeredness: Flexibility, Equity, and Belonging

Throughout the listening session, alumni made clear that Tri-C's future success rests on its ability to place students—especially nontraditional, marginalized, and first-generation students—at the absolute center of its culture, programs, and services.

This requires designing flexible class schedules, expanding evening, weekend, and online options, and creating intentional spaces where students feel they belong. One participant summed it up bluntly: "*More caring about students—that's what we were known for, and that's what we need to double down on.*"

Institutional Values: Transparency, Inclusivity, and Community Accountability

Alumni articulated a clear vision for the values that should shape Tri-C's future. These include:

- **Transparency:** "Transparency in everything" was a recurring demand.
 - **Inclusivity:** Tri-C must go beyond surface-level diversity efforts and actively work to remove systemic barriers.
 - **Affordability and Accessibility:** Tri-C must remain financially within reach for all students.
 - **Innovation:** Tri-C should embrace technology, new learning models, and bold experimentation.
 - **Community Accountability:** Tri-C's leadership should maintain constant dialogue with students, alumni, and the broader community, ensuring decisions reflect real community needs.
-

Civic Education and Social Leadership: Preparing Students to Shape Their Communities

Finally, alumni urged Tri-C to see education not only as job preparation but also as a foundation for lifelong civic engagement and leadership. Alumni want to see Tri-C

graduates become socially responsible citizens who understand the power of their voices—whether at work, in their neighborhoods, or at the ballot box.

As one alumnus put it, "*Help students to be civically responsible—to exercise their voice responsibly, audibly, and even at the ballot box.*" This fusion of education, civic responsibility, and social leadership was seen as a key way Tri-C can distinguish itself while fulfilling its mission as a community-serving institution.

Conclusion: Tri-C as a Catalyst for Hope and Opportunity

In sum, alumni painted a portrait of Tri-C as a beacon of hope and opportunity for Northeast Ohio—a college that transforms not only students' lives but entire communities. The college's future mission, values, and strategies must blend innovation, equity, community engagement, and workforce relevance, while staying true to its student-centered roots.

As one participant concluded, "*Tri-C is not just about education; it's about hope. And hope is something we can't afford to lose.*" This sense of purpose-driven transformation—grounded in community, responsive to change, and centered on students—can guide Tri-C into its next era as a truly transformative institution.