

From the desk of the Vice President of Institutional Progress and Effectiveness

**Strategic Transformation Planning Summary**  
**Community and Strategic Partners Listening Session**  
**March 20, 2025**

We extend our sincere gratitude to all community and strategic partners who participated in the recent listening session. Your willingness to share your unique insights, candid feedback, and thoughtful recommendations is invaluable as Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) continues to evolve and enhance its impact. The discussions focused on the challenges and opportunities facing higher education, workforce development, and community engagement. Participants called for a more agile, innovative, and student-centered approach to ensure that Tri-C remains a leader in providing accessible and impactful education. This summary captures the key themes that emerged, emphasizing the need for transformation, responsiveness, and strategic partnerships.

**A Call for Bold, Agile, and Transformational Change**

The feedback gathered from the listening session underscores the urgency for Tri-C to embrace bold action and transformative change. Community and strategic partners emphasized that Tri-C must evolve to meet the shifting landscape of higher education and workforce demands by prioritizing agility, innovative partnerships, and a renewed commitment to accessibility and student success.

**Workforce Development and Industry Alignment**

A strong consensus emerged around the need for Tri-C to align its curriculum more closely with evolving industry trends. Attendees called for the expansion of short-term certification programs, particularly in high-demand fields such as AI, healthcare, and skilled trades. One participant noted, *"Students are looking for short-term certifications that provide direct access to employment."* Another emphasized the necessity of *"meeting employer needs quickly and ensuring students graduate with both technical and practical skills."*

Tri-C was encouraged to enhance partnerships with local businesses, ensuring graduates are not only employable but also positioned for economic mobility. There was also a call for

more entrepreneurial education and internship opportunities directed toward tangible employment outcomes. A stakeholder stated, *"Providing entrepreneurial resources can increase real-world preparedness and foster a culture of innovation among students."*

### **Reimagining Student Recruitment and Retention**

Tri-C must adopt a more dynamic and inclusive approach to student recruitment and retention. With declining populations and a shifting perception of higher education's value, attendees stressed the need to target non-traditional students, including adult learners, immigrants, and underrepresented communities. A participant challenged the College to *"change the approach to recruiting—focus on students over 25 rather than just high schoolers."*

Additionally, there was a push to engage students much earlier in their educational journeys. As one community leader put it, *"We should be enrolling students as early as 7th grade to build a pipeline that keeps them engaged and invested in higher education."* This early intervention strategy would ensure that Tri-C remains a pivotal player in regional educational attainment and workforce readiness.

### **Breaking Down Systemic Barriers to Access**

Participants urged Tri-C to take aggressive steps in dismantling systemic barriers to education. Financial constraints, lack of transportation, and limited childcare services were cited as persistent obstacles preventing many students from enrolling or completing their studies. A stakeholder pointed out, *"For some students, the biggest challenge isn't academics—it's access. Transportation and childcare should not be barriers to higher education."*

To address these issues, the College was encouraged to expand flexible learning models, including evening, weekend, and hybrid courses. A key theme was the need for a holistic approach to student support, with one attendee asserting, *"Education doesn't happen in isolation. Wraparound services are essential for student success."*

### **Leveraging Technology and Innovation**

The integration of technology and future-focused learning was a recurring theme. Community members emphasized the importance of preparing students for careers in emerging fields, particularly in artificial intelligence, digital literacy, and automation. One

participant warned, *"If Tri-C doesn't evolve with technology, it risks becoming obsolete. We need cutting-edge programs that address the reality of today's workforce."*

Additionally, there was a call to make education more experiential and application-driven. *"Students don't just need knowledge; they need to apply it in real-world scenarios,"* an employer representative noted. This highlights the necessity of project-based learning, co-op programs, and simulation-based training that mirrors industry expectations.

### **Shifting Institutional Culture: Agility, Accountability, and Equity**

A clear message from the session was that Tri-C must adopt a more agile institutional culture—one that prioritizes adaptability, inclusivity, and student-centered policies. Participants expressed concern that higher education institutions, including Tri-C, are often slow to respond to economic shifts and student needs. A community leader remarked, *"We can't afford to be stagnant. Tri-C must build an institution that thrives under any political or economic circumstance."*

Additionally, accountability and transparency emerged as central values. There was a call for data-driven decision-making and a commitment to measurable student success outcomes. One participant advocated for *"specific metrics that hold the college accountable for improving graduation rates, job placement, and economic mobility."*

Equity and inclusion were also at the forefront, with participants urging Tri-C to maintain its commitment to serving historically marginalized populations. A speaker emphasized, *"Tri-C must be an unapologetic champion for equity, ensuring that all students—regardless of background—have access to quality education and career pathways."*

### **Strengthening Community Engagement and Regional Impact**

Finally, the session highlighted the need for Tri-C to deepen its community engagement. Participants suggested that the College take a proactive role in addressing broader societal issues, from environmental justice to economic inequality. A proposal was made for more community-based classes, partnerships with nonprofits, and advocacy for students facing housing and food insecurity. *"Tri-C should be in the community—not just in classrooms,"* one attendee noted.

Additionally, there was a call for the College to take a leadership role in regional economic development, with a focus on strengthening employer connections and retaining talent in

Cuyahoga County. *"We need Tri-C to be the region's premier workforce development provider—not just a college, but a catalyst for economic growth,"* a business leader urged.

**Conclusion**

The insights shared in the listening session reinforce the importance of Tri-C's role in shaping the future of education and workforce development in the region. There is a clear demand for the College to be more innovative, adaptable, and deeply engaged with the community to meet the evolving needs of students and employers alike. By advancing initiatives that prioritize accessibility, economic mobility, and strategic partnerships, Tri-C can continue to be a driving force for progress. As one passionate attendee concluded, *"Tri-C has the power to be a game-changer—but only if it's willing to take decisive steps forward."*

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