Strategic Transformation Planning Summary
Tri-C Faculty, Staff, Students and Managers Listening Session
March 17, 2025

Challenges and Opportunities in Enrollment and Workforce Alignment

The listening session with Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) faculty, staff, students, and managers provided a candid and insightful discussion on the institution's current challenges, strengths, and opportunities for growth. Participants expressed a shared commitment to student success but voiced concerns over the institution's ability to keep pace with shifting student needs, technological advancements, and evolving workforce demands. Declining enrollment was a primary concern, with many attributing the trend to changing demographics, economic pressures, and skepticism about the return on investment in higher education. One faculty member noted, "*We need to rethink how we deliver education—students want faster, more flexible options that directly lead to employment.*" Staff and administrators acknowledged the urgency of adapting programs, modernizing course delivery methods, and improving institutional agility to meet the needs of a diverse student body.

A key theme throughout the discussion was the need for Tri-C to reinforce its value proposition while maintaining accessibility and affordability. Faculty emphasized the importance of ensuring students receive not just an education, but a pathway to sustainable employment. "We have to balance academic rigor with real-world applicability," a staff member remarked, pointing out that some existing programs do not lead to viable career outcomes. Calls for expanding competency-based education, micro-credentials, and employer-aligned training programs were frequent, reflecting a broader institutional desire to keep pace with workforce demands. Additionally, participants underscored the importance of online learning and flexible scheduling, acknowledging that "*online and hybrid learning aren't just trends—they're expectations.*"

Institutional Culture, Employee Support, and Student Services

The discussion also highlighted the role of Tri-C's faculty and staff in fostering a supportive and inclusive campus environment. Many expressed concerns over the impact of staffing shortages and administrative burdens on their ability to provide high-quality education and student support. "*We need to ensure our employees are equipped and supported—*

because if we're struggling, students will feel it too," said one manager, referencing the need for professional development, competitive compensation, and a culture of collaboration. Faculty and staff also stressed the need to address student challenges beyond the classroom, advocating for expanded mental health resources, childcare services, and transportation assistance. One faculty member remarked, "*A student who is hungry or worried about rent isn't going to be able to focus on coursework,"* reinforcing the idea that student success is tied to holistic institutional support.

Strengths and Areas for Growth in Community Engagement and Branding

Additionally, participants highlighted Tri-C's strengths, including its affordability, strong community partnerships, and dedication to student-centered learning. Many faculty members took pride in their direct industry experience and commitment to applied learning, which helps bridge the gap between education and employment. "*Our students benefit from hands-on learning with instructors who are still engaged in their fields,"* one professor noted, emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong faculty-industry ties. A student further added, "*I learn best when I can directly see how I will use what I am learning.*" However, some participants felt that Tri-C's brand recognition and employer engagement efforts could be improved. "*We have great programs, but we're not always telling our story effectively,"* a staff member stated, suggesting that enhanced marketing and employer outreach could boost enrollment and employment outcomes.

Institutional Values and Strategic Priorities for the Future

Institutional values were another major topic of discussion, with participants emphasizing the need for greater transparency, communication, and accountability. Many called for more inclusive decision-making processes that actively involve faculty and staff in shaping policies and strategic initiatives. "*We need to break down silos—too often, decisions are made without input from the people directly impacted,"* one administrator remarked. A student contributed "*sometimes it's difficult to understand how to best use the services the college provides; they often don't provide what we really need to make us jump through hoops."* Others stressed the importance of maintaining a culture of respect and collaboration, both among employees and in interactions with students. "*We talk about student success, but we also need to prioritize employee morale and well-being,"* a faculty member added, pointing to concerns over burnout and workload distribution.

Looking ahead, staff, students, faculty, and managers identified several strategic priorities that could help Tri-C thrive. Expanding workforce-aligned training programs, deepening employer partnerships, and embedding technology-driven skills training into curricula were frequently mentioned. Participants also advocated for strengthening alumni engagement,

increasing career services support, and fostering a sense of community among students and staff. A shared belief emerged that, despite its challenges, Tri-C has the potential to be a transformative force in the region—provided it remains adaptable, innovative, and committed to its mission. As one faculty member succinctly put it, "*We have the opportunity to lead, but we need to be bold enough to change*."

Conclusion

The overarching themes from the listening session illustrate a strong commitment to student success, institutional agility, and community impact. Participants emphasized the need to adapt to workforce changes, modernize educational delivery, and provide holistic student support. Strengthening Tri-C's brand presence and employer partnerships emerged as key strategies for growth, along with reinforcing a culture of transparency, collaboration, and innovation. As Tri-C moves forward, embracing these priorities will be crucial in ensuring long-term sustainability and positioning the institution as a leader in workforce education and student success.

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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.