Strategic Transformation Planning Summary
Tri-C Foundation Board Listening Session
February 20, 2025

The Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) Foundation Board listening session provided insightful feedback to support the development of the college's mission statement, institutional values, and strategic transformation plan. A strong theme that emerged was the need for Tri-C to be more agile, transformative, and responsive to changing educational and workforce landscapes. The discussion emphasized urgent action in addressing enrollment challenges, fostering strategic partnerships, ensuring affordability and accessibility, and strengthening a student-centered institutional culture that embraces continuous innovation.

Embracing Agility to Address Enrollment and Workforce Challenges

A central concern was the decline in enrollment and the shifting demographics in Northeast Ohio. Board members stressed that Tri-C must become more adaptable and innovative in its approach to attracting and retaining students. "*We need to rethink our norms; act differently,*" one participant stated, highlighting the need for immediate action. The introduction of applied bachelor's degrees was widely praised as a transformative step, with one board member noting, "*Adding a four-year degree is huge! And the cost savings is great!*" However, participants emphasized that this should be part of a broader strategy to expand program offerings and modernize educational delivery methods.

The conversation also highlighted the necessity of aligning educational programs with workforce demands. "*Collaboration with the business community is essential—training the workforce they need is our responsibility,*" a participant asserted. By integrating emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and ensuring program agility, Tri-C can better prepare students for a rapidly evolving labor market.

Strengthening Community and Industry Partnerships for Greater Impact

The Board stressed the importance of leveraging industry and community partnerships to drive transformation. Tri-C's ability to function as a bridge between education and employment is one of its greatest strengths. "*Strong corporate partnerships,*" noted one board member, "ensure that students graduate with skills that lead directly to well-paying jobs."

Participants called for a more proactive and strategic approach to engaging with businesses and community organizations. "*Employers should be invited into curriculum design,*" one member suggested, reinforcing the need to develop real-world relevant programs that can swiftly respond to industry trends. Deepening partnerships with local and regional businesses will ensure that Tri-C remains competitive and continues to provide high-impact educational pathways.

Prioritizing Affordability, Accessibility, and Student Support

Affordability remains a cornerstone of Tri-C's mission, and the Board reaffirmed its importance. "*The cost! The value of the offering for the cost as compared to other options is undeniable,*" one member stated, reinforcing the need to maintain low-cost, high-quality education. However, affordability alone is not enough—Tri-C must continue to remove systemic barriers that hinder student success. Wrap-around services, such as food assistance, mental health resources, and career counseling, were seen as critical elements in ensuring student retention and success. "*We must provide support services so students can focus on their education, not external stressors,*" another board member emphasized.

Institutional Transformation: Innovation, Agility, and Inclusion

To thrive in a rapidly changing higher education landscape, Tri-C must be willing to embrace bold and transformative strategies. "*We must be willing to think outside the box and act differently,*" one board member asserted. The ability to pivot quickly, embrace technological advancements, and rethink traditional education models will be crucial. A focus on digital learning, flexible course structures, and competency-based education will position Tri-C as an agile and future-ready institution.

Equally important is maintaining a commitment to inclusivity and community engagement. "*Tri-C must be a place where everyone belongs, regardless of their background or circumstances,*" one participant observed. This requires ongoing efforts to create a welcoming, diverse, and equitable educational environment that caters to both traditional and non-traditional learners.

Strategic Transformation and Future Growth

Board members strongly advocated for Tri-C to adopt a future-focused mindset, ensuring financial sustainability while expanding its reach and influence. Diversifying revenue streams, increasing endowment growth, and forming strategic alliances were all identified as necessary steps. "*Future-proofing funding by creating new revenue streams is critical,*" one participant noted, suggesting that Tri-C explore additional corporate training programs, grant opportunities, and innovative funding mechanisms.

Additionally, several members proposed bold strategies for growth, including regional expansion through partnerships or acquisitions. "*Consider acquiring struggling community colleges to broaden our reach and impact,*" one member suggested, emphasizing the need to think beyond traditional institutional boundaries.

Conclusion

The listening session reaffirmed the Board's commitment to positioning Tri-C as a transformative leader in affordable, accessible, and workforce-aligned education. However, to truly thrive, Tri-C must be more agile, innovative, and proactive in responding to shifting educational and economic landscapes. Key priorities include addressing enrollment declines, strengthening industry partnerships, enhancing affordability and student support, and embracing forward-thinking strategies for institutional transformation. By fostering a culture of adaptability and bold action, Tri-C can ensure its long-term success as a vital educational and economic force in Northeast Ohio.

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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.