

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
2026-29 Strategic Plan Development Framework

Background:

The 2026-29 Strategic Plan will be developed over the course of 2025-26, with the goal of approval by the State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC) in August or September 2026. This document outlines a proposed framework for strategic planning to guide the process and resulting assets that will be used to implement the 2026-29 Strategic Plan.

Conceptual Structure:

The 2026-29 Strategic Plan will establish the system's direction at the highest level. Unlike the previous plan, which included six layers—goals, KPIs, objectives, strategies, annual priorities, and tactics—the new model streamlines the structure into two companion documents:

1. Strategic Plan (Three-Year Horizon)

- *Strategic Goals*: Broad, long-term aspirations that reflect the System's mission and vision. Goals are relevant and enduring for the life of the plan and provide overall direction without prescribing specific actions.
- *Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)*: The measurable definition of progress toward each goal. KPIs translate goals into concrete indicators with clear definitions, baselines, and measurable targets for both colleges and the System Office. They will be limited in number, balanced between student outcomes and enabling conditions, and tailored to account for contextual variance across the state.

2. Strategic Implementation Plan (Annual Horizon)

- *Tactics*: Specific, time-bound actions that colleges or the System Office carry out each year to advance KPIs and goals. Tactics are flexible, updated annually, and must tie directly to one or more KPIs.

Together, the Strategic Plan and Strategic Implementation Plan ensure alignment from high-level aspirations to measurable progress and concrete actions—balancing statewide coherence with local adaptability. By simplifying the number of layers, this approach increases focus, making it easier to prioritize, track progress, and align daily actions with long-term goals.

To provide clarity in tracking progress, the plan distinguishes between outcomes/results and milestones/activities. Outcomes and results represent the measurable impact of the plan—such as higher completion rates or improved student earnings—and answer the question, *what difference did it make?* Milestones and activities represent the specific steps and checkpoints along the way—such as launching a program, conducting training, or signing an agreement—and answer the question, *what did we do and when?*

Stages of Timeline:

There are three stages of the strategic planning timeline that will occur over the coming year:

1. Strategic Goal Development

- *Timing:* September 2025 – January 2026
- *Focus:* Establish high level goals for the 2026-29 NCCCS Strategic Plan to incorporate into the System President search profile.

2. KPI and Strategic Implementation Tactic Development

- *Timing:* January – June 2026
- *Focus:* Define measurable KPIs and actionable tactics, with clear ownership between the System Office and colleges.

3. Strategic Plan Approval and Rollout

- *Timing:* July – September 2026
- *Focus:* Refine and adopt the full 2026-29 NCCCS Strategic Plan with the new System President in place.

Roles & Engagement:

In this model of strategic planning, three roles are distinguished—Co-Owners, Partners, and Stakeholders—each defined by their relationship to decision-making, risk, and benefit, as well as by the level of engagement expected in the process.

Co-Owners

- *Who:* The System Office and the 58 community colleges.
- *Criteria:* Entities that share direct accountability for defining, implementing, and achieving the goals of the strategic plan.
- *Engagement:* Deeply involved in all stages of development and implementation, from defining goals and KPIs to co-creating tactics and monitoring results.

Partners

- *Who:* Public and private entities (e.g., employers, state agencies, funders, nonprofits) that invest resources or advocate for the System.
- *Criteria:* Organizations that assume some degree of risk or commitment by aligning their priorities and resources with those of the NCCCS mission.
- *Engagement:* Engaged selectively in shaping KPIs and tactics where collaboration is critical (e.g., workforce alignment, shared services, funding), with an emphasis on shared investment and innovation.

Stakeholders

- *Who:* Students, families, communities, and employers who directly benefit from the work of the Community College System.
- *Criteria:* Groups whose success and well-being are impacted by the outcomes of the Strategic Plan but who do not carry responsibility for its execution.
- *Engagement:* Engaged through structured feedback mechanisms (e.g., surveys, focus groups, advisory boards) to ensure their perspectives inform goal-setting and evaluation without requiring intensive involvement in tactical design.

Alignment of Governance & Committees:

Strategic planning and implementation will be aligned with existing committee structures to clarify ownership, improve coordination, and build mutual accountability between the State Board, the System Office, and colleges:

- **The State Board Strategic Planning Committee** will oversee the development of the Strategic Plan and serve as the clearinghouse for the full Strategic Implementation Plan. Regular updates will focus on high-level status of both.
- **Other State Board Committees** will monitor and oversee specific Tactics in the Strategic Implementation Plan aligned with their charter. Regular updates will focus on details of Tactics or projects tied to the Strategic Implementation Plan.
- **The System Advisory Council** will align the NC Association of Community College Presidents (NCACCP), NC Association of Community College Trustees (NCACCT), System Office, and State Board around the Strategic Implementation Plan, using it as a standing focus of their agendas.
- **The NCACCP** will actively monitor and review progress via its committees and committee liaisons, ensuring colleges remain aligned with system priorities.

Global Objectives of the Planning Model:

This planning model is designed not only to set direction but also to shape how the System functions and collaborates. The intent is to foster clarity, accountability, and adaptability across the community college network by:

- **Establishing mutual accountability** between the System Office and colleges, with clearly defined ownership of each component of the plan.
- **Clarifying definitions** of strategic versus tactical and outcomes/results versus milestones/activities, so expectations and measures are consistent statewide.
- **Aligning governance and committees**, ensuring each Tactic is connected to the relevant State Board and NCACCP committee for oversight and support.
- **Promoting responsiveness**, so the System can adapt proactively to economic, political, and cultural shifts while maintaining focus on long-term goals.
- **Maintaining urgency and focus**, preventing drift by driving timely execution and visible progress year over year.
- **Synchronizing planning cycles**, so the Strategic Plan, Strategic Implementation Plans, and System President's goals reinforce one another as a coherent framework.

The new planning model aims to unify leadership, strengthen collaboration with colleges, and create a culture both disciplined and adaptive—equipping the next System President and NCCCS to deliver results for students, communities, and employers.

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