

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community College Presidents Input on NCCC System Strategic Plan

Background: To inform the development of the 2026-29 NCCC System Strategic Plan, community college presidents provided input on the proposed planning framework, initial high-level goals, and other considerations that may impact the plan’s ultimate success.

Input sessions were conducted in October 2025 with each of the five regional groups of presidents – Western, Eastern, Central-RTP, Central-Southernmost, and Central-Northernmost – as well as individual sessions, as requested. About 80% of presidents (46 of 58) were able to participate. Dr. Zach Barricklow and Ms. Alex Doles facilitated the input sessions.

Three documents were shared with presidents for review and discussion:

1. 2026-29 Strategic Plan Development Framework
2. 2026-29 Strategic Plan Development Timeline
3. 2022-26 Strategic Plan Goals

The following summarizes key input from community college presidents, with additional detail retained to inform the System presidential search and future phases of System strategic plan development.

Input on 2026-29 Strategic Plan Development Framework and Timeline:

Conceptual Structure

Presidents broadly affirmed the simplified, three-year structure and sequencing of Goals, KPIs, and Tactics—while cautioning that success will depend on maintaining focus, governance discipline, and clarity of System Office roles.

Roles & Engagement

Presidents affirmed the “Co-Owners, Partners, and Stakeholders” framework as a clear and appropriate way to define engagement.

Stages of Timeline

Presidents endorsed the three-stage timeline and its logical sequencing of Goals, KPIs, and Tactics, while emphasizing that the next System President must be empowered to shape and own the final plan.

Alignment of Governance & Committees

Presidents supported clearly linking the System Strategic Plan to governance structures – both within the State Board and across the broader system network—so that authority, accountability, and communication flow coherently in relation to the System Strategic Plan, and the distinct roles of governance versus administration are honored.

Global Objectives of the Planning Model

Presidents generally affirmed the overarching objectives of the new planning model—building shared accountability, focusing on measurable outcomes, and fostering agility across the system—while emphasizing that success will depend on disciplined governance, clarity of roles, and a renewed culture of service within the System Office.

Input on Initial High-Level Goals:

Presidents expressed strong interest in reshaping the next strategic plan's goals to not only include system-wide aspirations but also and especially to reflect the System Office's unique responsibilities and contributions that complement the local work of colleges. Across regions, participants called for a concise set of high-level goals that demonstrate the System Office's statewide value, link clearly to North Carolina's policy and workforce priorities, and focus on outcomes the System Office can directly influence, while accounting for reciprocal alignment between the System Strategic Plan and local strategic plans per community college.

Summary of Themes:

Across all five regional discussions, presidents expressed a shared optimism about the opportunity this planning process creates—not only to define a new set of goals, but to strengthen how the System Office and colleges work together as one system with shared purpose. They consistently described three themes that should anchor the next strategic plan:

First, clarify and reinforce the role of the System Office. Presidents want a System Office that functions as an **enabler, advocate, and connector**—focusing on creating the conditions for colleges to operate effectively and efficiently – policy alignment, funding advocacy, system modernization and shared infrastructure, and supportive services – rather than operational control or direct student engagement. The guiding question should be, *“Does this decision help colleges better serve students?”*

Second, align governance and accountability around shared priorities. Presidents called for clearer boundaries between governance and administration, stronger alignment among the State Board, System Office, and college leadership groups, and mutual accountability for results. The strategic plan should embed processes for continuous learning, transparent reporting, and timely adjustments when tactics underperform.

Third, foster a culture of responsiveness and collaboration. Presidents emphasized that the plan's success depends on a cultural shift within the System Office. They encouraged the next System President and leadership team to engage frequently with colleges, build a workplace culture that mirrors the collaborative spirit expected across the state, and strengthens all colleges to effectively serve students.

Taken together, these themes point toward a unified vision for the North Carolina Community College System: locally unique, system strong, and aligned to build the best workforce in the world.

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