



STEPPING FORWARD

THE
NATIONAL
JUDICIAL
COLLEGE
FIVE-YEAR
STRATEGIC
PLAN

2023-2027

Introduction: Stepping Forward

The title of this strategic plan has a two-fold meaning.

Every strategic plan is designed to be a map to a destination. As George Harrison sang, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.” This plan spells out where The National Judicial College intends to go over the next five years and maps out the route. If we’ve done our job well, all that remains is to take the first steps forward and begin the journey.

The second meaning of Stepping Forward relates to courage, faith and resolve. We are all familiar with a military leader or head of some other organization laying out a difficult challenge and calling for volunteers to literally step forward. Every individual then does a quick internal calculation on whether they’re up for the challenge.

This is a step-forward moment for The National Judicial College.

Two fundamental elements of our democracy – the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary to make independent, impartial decisions – are under attack, and the threats are growing. Priority 1 of this plan focuses on how the College, as an educational institution, intends to help the judiciary respond to those threats.

The other five Strategic Priorities, such as achieving financial sustainability, are more or less carryovers from our previous strategic plan. They are so basic to the functioning of any nonprofit that they will likely always be imperatives. Priority 1 stands apart because, as the chair of the Board of Trustees’ Strategic Planning Committee, Edward Blumberg, put it, if the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law go away, nothing else will really matter.

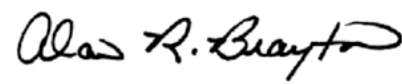
This plan is the product of nearly a year of deep thought and collaborative effort by our staff and by representatives of the College’s many other stakeholders: the Board of Trustees and its standing committees along with its Strategic Planning Committee, the Board of Visitors, the Faculty Council, the Tribal Advisory Board, the Joint Committee of Law Firm Partners and Corporate Counsel, and the Alumni Relations Committee.

Thank you to all involved for your time, your continuing support, and your conviction that The National Judicial College must step forward and accomplish these objectives. Drawing this map to the future has been a group effort, and it will take the same teamwork to carry our beloved College to the destination we have collectively chosen.

Forward together.



Hon. Benes Z. Aldana (Ret.)
President & CEO



Alan R. Brayton, Esq.
Chair, Board of Trustees



The Six Strategic Priorities

1. Promote the Independence and Impartiality of the Judiciary
2. Maintain Leadership in Academic Excellence
3. Achieve Long-Term Financial Sustainability and Institutional Resilience
4. Raise the Public Profile of the NJC and Continue to Build its Brand
5. Develop and Sustain a High-Performing Team of Professionals and Volunteer Leadership for Operational Effectiveness
6. Strengthen Our Strategic Alliances and Partnerships

History of the College

Celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2023, The National Judicial College was founded at the recommendation of an American Bar Association committee led by Supreme Court Justice Tom C. Clark. The committee identified the need for continuing education to improve the administration of justice.

Some in the legal community worried that the sight of judges enrolling in continuing education courses would be tantamount to, in Clark’s words, “confessing inadequacy.” But the training proved immediately popular with judges from coast to coast who wanted to do the best they could in carrying out their sacred responsibilities.

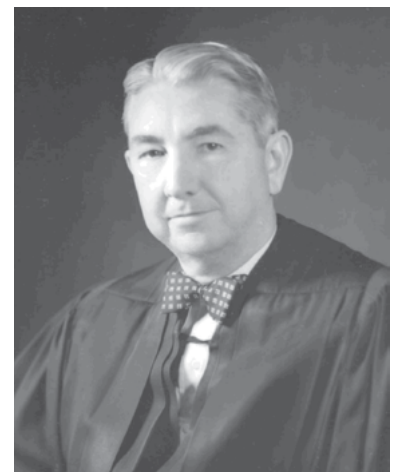
Support from the Max C. Fleischmann Foundation helped the College establish its permanent home on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno in 1964 followed by construction of a headquarters building in 1971. A 1999 addition, funded by the State of Nevada and the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, more than doubled the building’s size.

From its beginning, the College has followed a model of “judges teaching judges.” Each year about 300 active and retired judges volunteer their time as instructors.

Also from the beginning, judges have consistently said that the best part of the NJC experience is meeting judges from other places and learning how others deal with the unique challenges of the profession. Many NJC faculty and students become mentors and friends for life.

The NJC continues to receive major financial support from the State of Nevada, major foundations, government agencies and individual donors.

During most years, between 8,000 and 11,000 judges of all kinds study with the College from all 50 states and several foreign countries. During the Covid pandemic, when in-person classes had to be cancelled, enrollment topped 20,000 for the first time as online offerings were greatly expanded. These included webinars on how to conduct court proceedings during the pandemic.



Principles that Guide the College

Mission

To make the world a more just place by educating and inspiring its judiciary

Vision of the future

We will be...

- ... the leading judicial education institution in the world, recognized for advancing justice and promoting the rule of law;
- ... a learning organization committed to improving continually and developing game-changing innovations in judicial education while also practicing the discipline and stewardship necessary to ensure financial health;
- ... deeply connected to our mission and to our judges and provide unparalleled professional learning experiences locally and globally. We will facilitate inspired opportunities for judges to forge meaningful relationships and make a deeper impact in their communities and the world;
- ... committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in all that we do in order to engage the judiciary in fulfilling its role of providing "equal justice under law."

Core Values.

1. Demonstrate an absolute commitment to justice

Democracy has never been sustainable without a fair and functioning system of justice. We will do everything we can to promote justice for all.

2. Deliver and inspire excellence and innovation in our work

We aspire to world-class performance in everything we do, and we seek to inspire the same high standards in others, especially those who work in the field of justice.

3. Champion integrity

We will foster and promote a culture of trust, openness, honesty and ethical strength. We will model integrity and demonstrate moral courage, even when it's not easy or convenient.

4. Practice engaged leadership

We will be proactive in discovering and meeting the needs of the judiciary. We will stand up for justice and speak out against those who threaten it.



Priority 1 Promote the Independence and Impartiality of the Judiciary

Context

Judicial independence means the judiciary should be separate from the other two branches of government and that judicial decisions should not be influenced by the other branches' desires, partisan loyalties, public opinion or anything else. In a just society, judicial decisions are based solely on the law and the facts. This is how our society has agreed to be governed.

Many supporters of democracy are concerned that judicial independence is threatened and, along with it, the rule of law.

The Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law reported that in 2021, legislators in 16 states introduced 37 bills that would have put pressure or restrictions on judicial decision-making, targeted individual judges for unpopular rulings, or taken away the courts' authority to manage their own rules or resources. Five such bills were enacted.

In October 2018, an informal survey of the College's more than 13,000 judicial alumni found that 9 out of 10 believed judicial independence was threatened.

Although the Model Code of Judicial Conduct has long counseled judges to steer clear of expressing opinions on issues that could come before them, the code also compels judges to uphold and promote the independence, integrity and impartiality of the judiciary. The bylaws of The National Judicial College contain the same mandate for the College.

The College co-organized a national symposium, Democracy's Last Line of Defense, held May 26, 2022, in Chicago. The program featured nearly 40 leading figures from the legal, judicial, political, media and academic worlds who looked at why and how to preserve the rule of law and an independent, impartial judiciary.

How will the College promote the independence and impartiality of the judiciary?

1. *By providing forums for visionaries and thought leaders and by working to ensure that their ideas are brought to the attention of those who can defend the judiciary*

We will serve as a convener for the judiciary to discuss ways to preserve its independence and impartiality and the role it plays in protecting our democracy.

2. *By hosting a leading jurist who will develop plans and programming and pursue research to promote the rule of law*

The jurist will, for example, broaden the scope and improve the quality of our current programming on the importance of the rule of law to include the right to a jury trial.

3. *By making our voice heard*

We will speak out on issues important to the judiciary.



Priority 2 Maintain Leadership in Academic Excellence

Context

The College has a long tradition of achieving high customer satisfaction.

All NJC courses are evaluated through post-course surveys in which participants rate the overall value of the course, discussion groups, materials and faculty. The course evaluations use a scale of 1 to 7 with 7 being the most favorable. In 2021, the average course score exceeded 6.5.

The College offers courses in both core skills and advanced topics – a total of about 200 educational events per year.

No other organization rivals the NJC’s depth of programming on subjects judges want: four days on judicial writing, four days on handling self-represented litigants, four days on evidence. No organization provides a library of judicial education materials available online and on demand 24/7 with 75-minute webinars taking place every week.

When the Covid pandemic forced cancelation of all in-person courses in 2020, the faculty and staff created a slew of new online offerings, including a series of webinars on how to conduct court during the pandemic. That same year, after the police killing of George Floyd, the College responded with a series of webinars on racial justice and how judges can keep the promise of equal justice under law. The College continues to grow its catalog of online and hybrid courses; the latter can be taken either in person or online.

In recent years, the NJC has also created or partnered in offering new programs on climate science, environmental law, artificial intelligence and the law, a first-of-its kind Judicial Academy for lawyers who aspire to become judges, a course on creating an anti-racist courtroom, and a Judicial Leadership curriculum that helps judges implement innovations in their jurisdictions, such as special courts for veterans’ issues or for victims of human trafficking.



How will the College maintain its leadership in academic excellence?

1. *By continually reviewing and revising our educational offerings in response to the judiciary’s changing needs*
We will reimagine and revise our curriculum, including a review of our academic calendar, to adapt to the changing needs of the judiciary.
2. *By developing entirely new programs*
We will introduce new academic programs and expand others. We will also expand non-traditional programming that better prepares judges to fulfill their roles inside and outside the courtroom and better prepares the judiciary as a whole to be an independent third branch of government.
3. *By employing advanced technology and increasing financial aid*
We will increase access to our programming through new technology, instructional design principles, and increased scholarship funding.
4. *By diversifying the faculty*
We will continue to recruit a diverse cadre of expert faculty and provide them the support necessary to maximize their impact.
5. *By developing or enhancing expertise in key areas*
We will develop programmatic “centers of excellence” in key areas such as judicial ethics, judicial security, racial equity and justice, leadership and coaching development, environmental law, the rule of law, and courts and the media.
6. *By gathering the data necessary to make informed decisions about courses*
We will invest resources to improve the evaluation and analysis of our courses and faculty. With this data-driven instruction strategy, we will be able to assess the impact of our courses in courtrooms and the communities they serve.
7. *By expanding to serve additional justice-related support personnel*
We will develop action plans to educate and train court-support personnel, mediators, and others who perform judicial, quasi-judicial or administrative functions (e.g., judicial clerks, pro-tem judges, court-appointed neutrals, commissioners, and hearing officers).
8. *By expanding activity abroad*
We will dedicate resources to expanding our international engagement, primarily by competing for federal grants and other funding opportunities through the U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development, and by partnering with sister organizations like the ABA Rule of Law Initiative and other judicial organizations.
9. *By conducting more research on the administration of justice*
We will expand our research engagement and capabilities consistent with our chartered purpose of improving the administration of justice and judicial education.

Priority 3 Achieve Long-Term Financial Sustainability and Institutional Resilience

Context

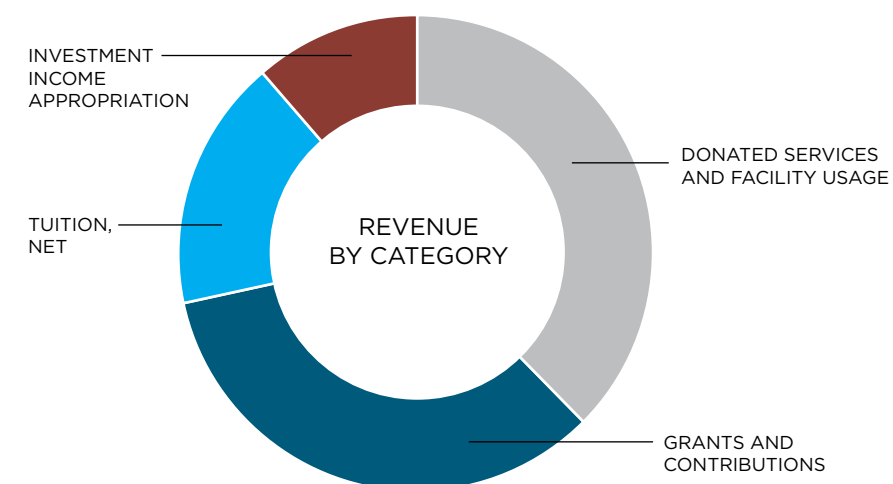
The College's bottom line benefits from some unusual characteristics.

The NJC building, on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno, was paid for decades ago by donations and is maintained by the university for free. UNR even pays the utilities.

NJC courses are taught overwhelmingly by unpaid volunteers (active and retired judges).

The College operates as a school, but only about 20 percent of its revenues come directly from the educational enterprise (tuition or contracts to provide custom courses to states, tribes or countries). Being less than self-sufficient based on operating revenues is not unique for a nonprofit. Some are entirely dependent on donations.

This chart illustrates the current breakdown of NJC revenue sources:



Recent years have seen strong growth in the College's endowment. The funds reached a total value of nearly \$20 million in 2021 but had fallen back to \$15.4 million by September 2022 due mainly to the downturn in the stock market.

Donations totaled \$1.09 million in 2021, not far off the all-time highs of \$1.4 million in 2007 and \$1.3 million in 2019. Those records are expected to be shattered in 2022 due to: (1) a \$1 million gift from the Walmart Foundation to support a program that will aim to reduce racial disparities in youth incarceration rates; and (2) gifts in support of a national symposium on threats to judicial independence that the NJC co-presented in Chicago in May 2022.

The College's largest single source of unrestricted gift support in recent years has been the State of Nevada, which appropriated \$227,000 for the NJC in 2021.

Recent years have seen record grants from four of the College's traditionally largest program funders: the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the State Justice Institute.

During the Covid pandemic, the College was fortunate to receive two Paycheck Protection Program loans totaling \$1.02 million to sustain staff employment. Both loans have been forgiven.

The College also faces estimated obligations of \$4 million under its discontinued pension plan through the American Bar Association (since replaced by a 401(k)-type benefit). In 2020, low interest rates on loans and a then-positive investment environment prompted the College to take out a \$2 million loan to pay off roughly half of the obligation.

How will the College achieve long-term financial sustainability and institutional resilience?

1. *By meeting a consistent annual growth target for tuition-based courses*

Our long-term financial health depends on having a strong tuition-based enrollment, so we intend to achieve 20 percent growth in this category of courses each year for the next five years.

2. *By securing grants and donations*

We will prioritize securing funding from the following sources, in this order: (1) federal grants; (2) corporate and foundation grants; (3) individuals and law-firm donations; and (4) "cy pres" awards through the courts.

3. *By capitalizing on our board members' connections*

We will leverage the networks, talents and skills of present and past members of our mission support groups to connect us to additional funding sources.

4. *By developing metrics of proof of the NJC's return on investment*

We will quantify the value and impact of the NJC's work to the State of Nevada, the nation, the legal profession, and the judiciary.

5. *By attracting gifts in celebration of the College's 60th anniversary*

We will leverage our 60th Anniversary Celebration in 2023 to raise more individual, alumni and corporate donations than in any previous year.

6. *By taking steps to defend the College from cyber attacks and maintaining backups*

We will create a cyber-attack response plan that identifies vulnerabilities and specific critical assets and details a communication strategy. We will regularly test and update the plan.

Priority 4

Raise the Public Profile of the NJC and Continue to Build its Brand

Context

The College enjoys a sterling reputation among its thousands of alumni. Historically, about nine out of ten of our course participants have said they would take a course with the College at least once every 2-3 years if they could afford it; 65 percent have said they would like to do so every year.

The general public's perception of the College is different. Anecdotal evidence suggests that few people outside the judiciary have heard of the NJC, even in its home state.

Raising the College's profile would benefit not just direct appeals for donations and grants from individuals, government, foundations and other potential funding sources. It would also likely benefit the cause of judicial education more broadly, especially in terms of being a priority appropriation for legislatures.



Our previous strategic plan imagined The National Judicial College becoming to the profession of judging what the Julliard School is to the performing arts: a household name associated with the highest-quality instruction.

For obvious reasons, the College also seeks to broaden awareness throughout the judiciary of the quantity, quality and diversity of its programs and boost enrollment.

Current course-marketing efforts rely mostly on email campaigns to past participants and to judges who are new to the profession. The College acquires email addresses for new judges from alumni referrals, governors' press releases, and election/appointment news stories. We have also purchased contact lists from vendors.

Profile-raising efforts have included cultivating media interest through press releases (especially on results of polls of judges), organizing national events with notable speakers, the submission of op-eds, and partial sponsorship of the annual Journalist Law School at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles.

The communications/marketing staff consists of a director and a website administration and email-campaign specialist. The College contracts with freelancers for assistance with certain projects such as video production and design and layout of the Annual Report to Stakeholders.

How will the College raise the public profile of the NJC and continue to build its brand?

1. *By expanding and strengthening ties to influencers*

We will continue to strengthen our relationships with judicial and legal organizations, the media, and thought leaders to raise awareness of the importance of our mission.

2. *By adding a full-time marketing professional and outside public relations support*

We will invest in hiring a dedicated marketing professional to advance and oversee our marketing efforts, including social and digital media. We will also work with a public relations firm to achieve greater brand awareness through the media.

3. *By coaching, equipping and mobilizing supporters to promote the College*

We will encourage more engagement by members of our mission-support groups (including alumni) and staff to promote the work of the College.

4. *By increasing efforts to publicize civic outreach efforts*

We will continue to build on our commitment as a champion of civics education by expanding and publicizing our signature outreach program, Reading & Robes™, in each state.

5. *By repurposing metrics of proof of the NJC's return on investment to illustrate how the College benefits society*

We will use research results on the impact our courses have on judges and, by extension, society for communications and marketing campaigns.

6. *By producing and distributing a documentary illustrating the College's relevance and impact*

We will create a compelling, award-winning documentary film about the NJC's impact and influence in making the world a more just place, and as a result highlight the importance of the NJC to the public.

7. *By raising the profile of the National Tribal Judicial Center*

We will invest more resources in promoting the work of the tribal center as a distinctive part of our mission.

Priority 5

Develop and Sustain a High-Performing Team of Professionals and Volunteer Leadership for Operational Effectiveness

Context

As of September 2022, the College employed 32 full-time, benefits-eligible professionals. The most senior among them had been with the organization 40 years; several were new within the past year. The head count has remained in the range of the mid-20s to low-30s for many years.

Like many organizations, the NJC has faced recruiting challenges in the wake of the Covid pandemic. According to a report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in 2021 more than 47 million workers nationally quit their jobs in a phenomenon dubbed the Great Resignation. Many of these employees, the Chamber said, were in search of an improved work-life balance and flexibility, increased compensation, and a strong company culture.

The NJC offers compensation packages very competitive with other nonprofits in the region. This includes employer-matched contributions to a 401(k), vacation days that accrue over time, and other paid time off that includes 10 holidays a year and, most recently, a week off around July 4 and two weeks off during the December/New Year's holiday season.

During the pandemic, the College allowed staff to work from home and developed a Flexible Work Arrangement policy. The FWAs allow management to provide flexibility to our staff while continuing to deliver exceptional service to our learners. The College also invests in its employees through professional development. The NJC provides on-site staff training and professional development opportunities, covers expenses for outside job-related training, and reimburses staff for three higher-education tuition credits in job-related courses per semester.

As has been mentioned, the NJC benefits from having most of its courses taught by unpaid volunteers – active and retired judges. It has long been a tradition of the College to express appreciation to volunteers with a faculty development workshop and other professional development, awards programs, gifts, and group dinners. We understand how lucky we are to have these expert, dedicated instructors.

The College has transitioned from a full-time human resources and facilities director to a contract with a local human resources consultant, The Human Resource Connection Ltd. The consultant provides a depth and breadth of HR services, including training for staff and supervisors and on-boarding assistance.



How will the College develop and sustain a high-performing team of professionals and volunteer leadership for operational effectiveness?

1. *By never settling for less*

We will maintain a high-performing staff with competency, motivation and commitment to achieve our organizational goals.

2. *By continuing to provide workplace choices and investing in our teammates' potential*

We will continue to provide a flexible and supportive work environment with continuing professional development and opportunities for growth and promotion.

3. *By engineering a self-sustaining organization*

We will do a better job in documenting operations in order to preserve institutional knowledge. An organization is only as great as its employees. When employees retire or leave, institutional memory is lost, and that is a significant asset. Employee transitions are part of the cycle of renewal for any organization. Documenting and putting in place systems that will keep the organization running smoothly through such transitions is a priority.

4. *By being a learning organization*

We will provide ongoing training and mentoring for faculty as well as opportunities for faculty to gather on a regular basis, network and forge stronger connections.

5. *By improving the physical plant*

We will assess the College's current building infrastructure to develop a plan in making our space a state-of-the-art facility. That will include upgrading our studio for podcasting and instructional filming and our gathering spaces.

6. *By formulating contingency plans*

We will protect NJC resources – financial, intellectual, technological – through improved policies and procedures and regular tabletop exercises.

7. *By fielding a superior team of regular faculty and also specialists*

We will prioritize instructional-design training for staff and faculty and create a designated pool of subject-matter experts.

8. *By capitalizing on our board members' connections to recruit top talent*

We will identify and recruit mission-support group members with networks that hold potential to support the College.

9. *By using technology to improve coordination*

We will implement the use of project-management software for greater visibility of project progress across the NJC.



Priority 6 Strengthen Our Strategic Alliances and Partnerships



Context

Every year the College partners with more than 100 organizations to present programs that serve the judiciary throughout the United States and the world.

Here are *some* of our longtime and more frequent collaborators:

American Association for Justice
 American Bar Association Judicial Division
 ABA Litigation Section
 ABA Rule of Law Initiative
 ABA Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section
 Academy of Court-Appointed Neutrals
 American Board of Trial Advocates
 American Judges Association
 Appellate Judges Education Institute
 The Athens Roundtable
 Berkeley Judicial Institute
 Brennan Center for Justice
 Central Panel Directors
 Civil Justice Research Institute
 Conference of Chief Justices
 Conference of State Court Administrators
 DEI Collaborative
 Dividing the Waters
 Environmental Law Institute
 Federal Bar Association
 Flaschner Judicial Institute
 Fred T. Korematsu Institute
 Harvard Law School Executive Program
 International Academy of Trial Lawyers
 Judicial Research and Training Institute, South Korea
 Hispanic National Bar Association Judicial Division
 Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System
 International Association of LGBTQ+ Judges
 International Organization of Judicial Training
 Law School Admission Council
 Loyola Law School's Journalist Law School
 National Asian Pacific American Bar Association Judicial Council
 National Association of Administrative Law Judiciary
 National Association of Court Management
 National Association of Hearing Officers
 National Association of Presiding Judges and Court Executive Officers
 National Association of State Judicial Educators
 National Association of Women Judges
 National Bar Association Judicial Council
 National Center for State Courts
 National Computer Forensics Institute

National Conference of Bar Presidents
 National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
 National Consortium on Racial & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts
 National District Attorneys Association
 National Native American Bar Association
 Northern Nevada International Center
 Pacific Judicial Council
 UNLV Boyd Law School
 Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity
 World Justice Project

No one organization can serve all of the judiciary's needs, so we are grateful for our many partnerships and eager to form new ones, especially when they support a strategic priority.

How will the College strengthen its strategic alliances and partnerships?

1. *By maximizing Return on Investment (ROI)*

We will assess existing and potential relationships to ensure alignment with the College's strategic priorities and formalize relationships (with a memorandum of understanding or MOU) that merit the greatest investment of time and resources.

2. *By establishing the College as the go-to organization in certain realms*

We will reposition the College's competitive edge in key programmatic areas.

3. *By matching relationships to goals*

We will define the key audiences that the NJC will prioritize over the next five years and use these to identify partners and seek formal relationships.

4. *By spending shrewdly*

We will invest appropriate resources to strengthen and steward relationships with key strategic partners.

5. *By nourishing existing relationships and seeking others that are mutually beneficial*

We will support the growth of our partner-affiliate organizations, including Diving the Waters and the Appellate Judges Education Institute, and we will develop new partner-affiliate relationships.

6. *By looking beyond our traditional borders*

To accomplish the goals described in this plan, we will identify and pursue partnerships with influential individuals and organizations beyond the judicial and legal space.

Implementation

Detailed plans, including deliverables and deadlines, will be developed by College staff in partnership with all stakeholders and will be championed by the relevant standing committees of the Board of Trustees.

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