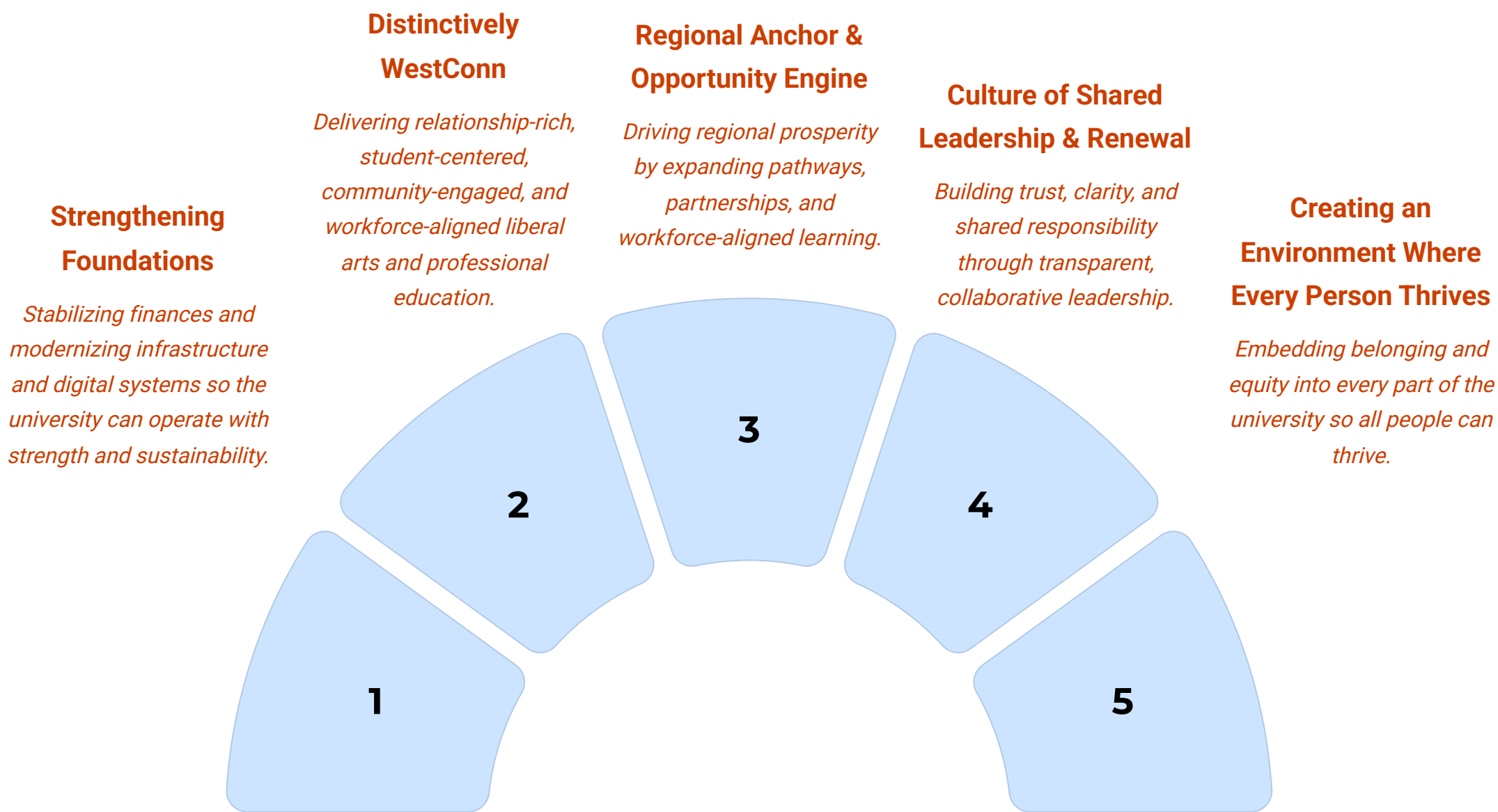


Western Rising Focused Strategy

Spring 2026 – Fall 2028 | Focused, Coordinated Action

Western Connecticut State University is entering a focused strategic period shaped by both our financial responsibilities and the progress already underway across the university. This path requires clarity, shared responsibility, and focused follow-through. This strategy refines existing planning, including *Western Rising 2030*, and is built on collaborative university efforts. It focuses on strategic initiatives designed to strengthen key areas over the next 3 years. It is also intended to clarify shared direction, not to prescribe actions, so that academic judgment and local decision-making remain central. **Our strategy is built on five institutional commitments. These commitments establish shared institutional direction; how we pursue them will be determined by faculty, staff and students across divisions, schools, departments and units.**

Our Commitments



Developed through a collaborative, community-wide process involving administration, faculty, staff, students, and community leaders, this Focused Strategy ensures a university-built and community-guided approach. The focus is on work that will strengthen enrollment, retention, sustainable operations, and institutional culture, while also allowing for long-term creative work and impact. Along the way, we've reviewed critical data to identify important opportunities. Each commitment will be guided by a Commitment Team that works to translate strategy into clear goals, indicators, and actionable plans, ensuring timely progress and alignment with our shared direction.

Why a Focused Strategy Now

This Focused Strategy is not a replacement for *Western Rising 2030*, adopted in 2024. It is a clarifying document synthesizing multiple planning and strategy efforts and designed to help the university concentrate its collective effort over the next three years.

Over the past year, the university has made important progress, including enrollment growth, strengthened advising and student support structures, renewed attention to shared governance, and early implementation of several new academic and community partnerships. This Focused Strategy builds on that momentum while sharpening where we direct our collective effort next.

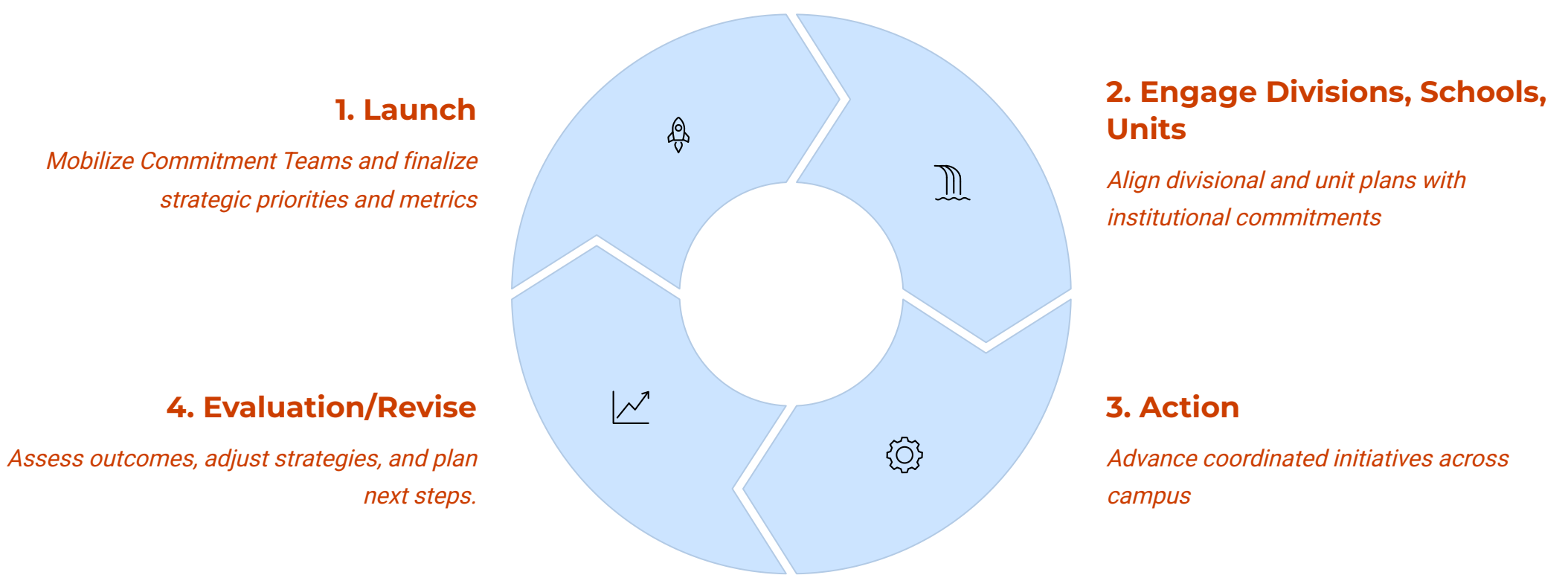
Our Focused Strategy identifies a limited number of shared priorities so that our work, assessment, and institutional decisions are better aligned while preserving local academic judgment, disciplinary integrity, and university governance and allowing units and departments to determine how best to contribute based on their contexts and expertise.

This Focused Strategy establishes our shared direction for the next phase of work; how we live into it will continue to evolve through evidence, dialogue, and shared responsibility.

How Planning and Learning Will Flow: Commitment Teams

Each commitment will be supported by a tri-led team consisting of a senior leadership team member, a faculty member, and a President’s Council member, along additional participants. Our faculty, staff and students will play a central role in shaping, leading, and evaluating this work.

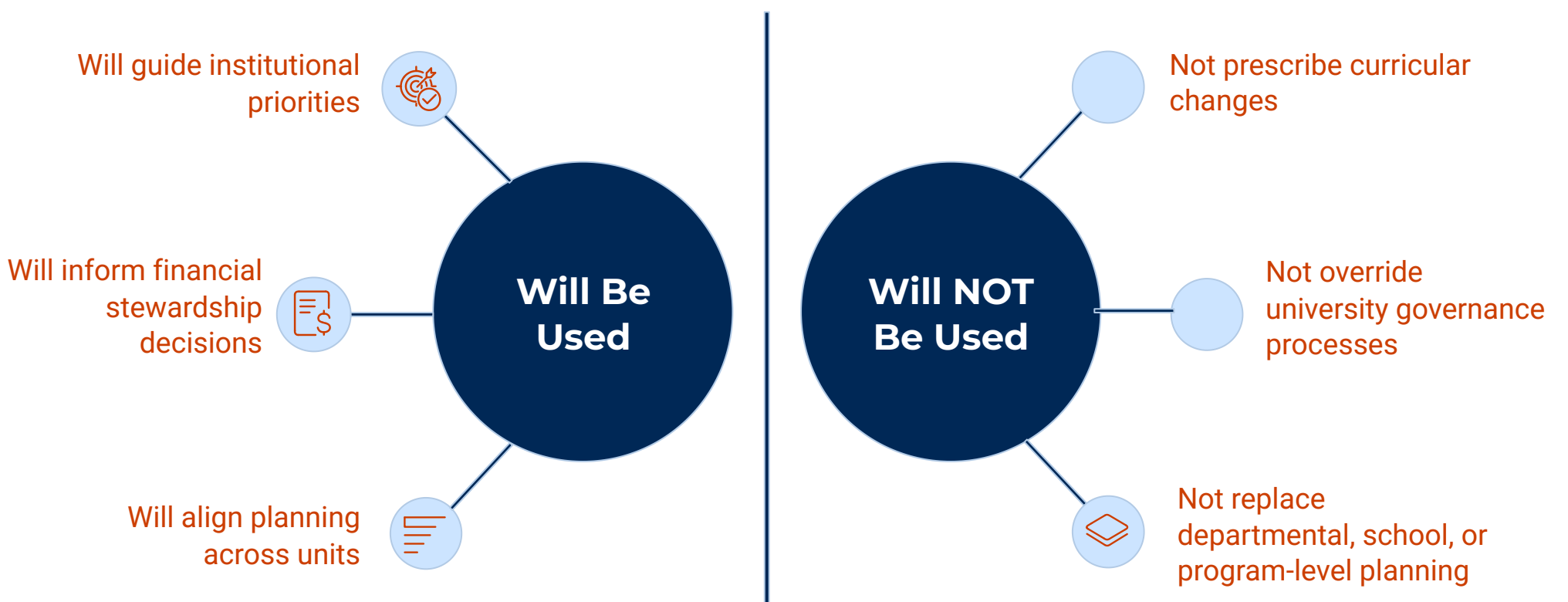
These teams will guide the strategy through a four-phase, iterative learning process:



For each commitment, the Team will work to:

- **Refine Baseline:** Establish a clear starting point.
- **Set Realistic Goals:** Define achievable goals and references.
- **Identify Barriers:** Recognize potential obstacles and challenges
- **Share Institutional Learning:** Distribute insights across the university

How This Focused Strategy Will and Will Not Be Used



Strengthening Foundations

Focus: Financial Stewardship • Protecting Our Mission • Institutional Stability • Modernizing Facilities & Digital Infrastructure

Purpose: Stabilize finances, modernize facilities and digital infrastructure, and align resources with mission-critical priorities.

Target: Eliminate a \$12.4M structural deficit by FY30, with measurable progress each fiscal year. Addressing the structural deficit is essential to preserving academic breadth, faculty and staff positions, and student access over time; it is a matter of stewardship.

Financial stewardship at WestConn is inseparable from academic quality and student success. Addressing our structural deficit is not an end in itself; it is necessary to protect academic programs, support faculty and staff, and sustain our public mission.

Strategies:

1. Align Budgets & Resources

- Transparent multi-year budget planning tied to recurring revenue and outcomes
- Personnel and operating decisions aligned with enrollment trends, strategic priorities, and academic mission
- Reinforce shared governance in financial planning; communicate progress regularly

2. Diversify & Grow Recurring Revenue

- Strengthen enrollment and retention pipelines
- Expand graduate, adult, online, and accelerated programs
- Grow employer and regional access and affordability initiatives
- Grow revenue in auxiliary services, summer programs, housing, dining, events, and other/new activities
- Expand philanthropy and sponsored projects

3. Modernize Facilities, Digital Infrastructure, & Operations

- Upgrade digital infrastructure, reliability, cybersecurity, and student systems
- Renew facilities and pinpoint essential new projects that support state and university goals
- Streamline administrative processes to reduce friction for students and employees

Indicators (to be finalized by team in next 30-90 days):



Annual balanced budgets by FY27 (with use of bridge funds)

~50% deficit reduction by FY27 (\$12.4M to ~\$6.2M)

Full deficit elimination by FY30 via revenue growth, efficiencies, and advocacy



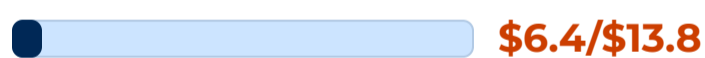
Recurring revenue growth: ~\$9.7M by FY30



Recurring cost efficiencies: ~\$6.5M by FY30



System/state additions: ~\$4.7M by FY30



Reserves: ≥30 days operating expenditures (~\$13.8M)

Operational Focus & Roles:

Build a culture of transparency and shared understanding around our financial reality and the steps needed to sustain our mission. Focus resources on what matters most: supporting students, faculty, and staff while investing in essential infrastructure and technology. IT and facilities work proactively to maintain and improve our physical and digital infrastructure. Academic and administrative units focus on student success and responsible stewardship of shared resources. All work under this commitment is guided by the principle of academic stewardship – ensuring that decisions about people, investments, and initiatives support the long-term vitality of our academic programs and student success.

President

Champions fiscal discipline, transparency, and communicates progress to build shared understanding

Senior leadership

Lead budget planning, advocates for state funding, ensures resource alignment and investment in mission-critical priorities

Faculty

Innovate programs, strengthen advising and mentorship, and support retention

Staff

Improve processes, delivers high-quality student services, and stewards resources

Students

Participate in shared governance and use resources responsibly.

Distinctively WestConn

Focus: Welcome • Weave • Widen • Wolves First – integrating Student Thriving, Community and Workforce Engagement, and Academic Agility

Purpose: Leverage WestConn's identity as Connecticut's largest 4-year Hispanic-Serving Institution and most diverse public university to deliver a relationship-rich and student-centered, community-engaged, and workforce-minded liberal arts and professional education. Ensure every student is welcomed into an inclusive community, woven into coordinated support networks, and provided with wide-ranging, agile academic opportunities aligned with community and workforce needs.

"Wolves First" is our decision lens: we choose what moves the whole university forward.

Strategies:

1. High-Impact, High-Quality Student Experience

- Expand mentorship
- Embed applied and workplace learning
- Strengthen early student alert systems
- Institutionalize First-Year and Transfer Experience
- Increase communication on workforce skill expectations

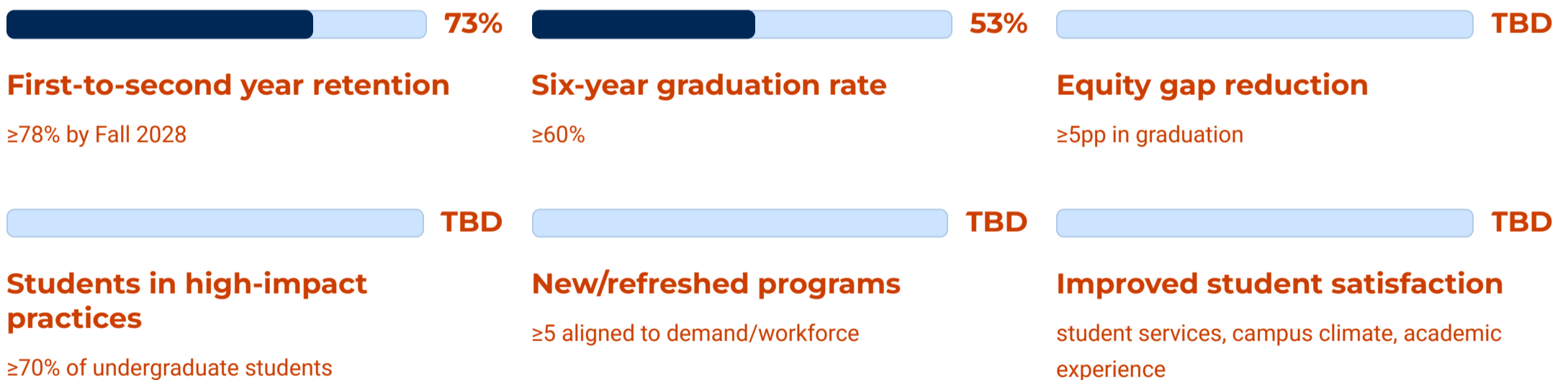
2. Close Equity Gaps & Advance Belonging

- Expand culturally responsive services
- Recognize linguistic diversity and ESL/heritage fluency
- Recommitment to and build on our student success team model
- Deliver intentional academic and student support interventions
- Greater collaboration and coordination of support resources; reduce barriers to student academic success

3. Refresh & Realign Academic Programs

- Continue to deliver rigorous and supportive, relationship-rich and student-centered, community-engaged, and workforce-minded liberal arts and professional education
- Align programs with demand and completion bottlenecks
- Increase agility in program refresh/revision
- Support faculty-led, evidence-informed program review and development
- Expand online/hybrid pathways, micro-credentials, non-credit

Indicators (to be finalized by team in next 30-90 days):



Operational Focus & Roles:

Coordinated student supports, clear pathways, and shared responsibility are central to supporting student thriving. Our advising ecosystem integrates professional advising with faculty advising and mentoring. Investments prioritize teaching faculty, staff, belonging, agility, advising, and career readiness.

President

Champions relationship-rich, student-centered, HSI-affirming identity and advocates for resources

Senior Leadership

Scales advising ecosystem, mentorship, applied learning, and supports shared learning through transparent communication

Faculty

Integrate mentorship, redesign programs with academic strength, foster applied learning, partner with student service/support units, and lead innovation

Staff

Deliver wraparound support, interventions, and student-centered evidence-informed services and outreach

Students

Engage in opportunities and work-based learning, use resources, provide feedback, and participate in mentorship

Regional Anchor & Opportunity Engine

Focus: Community Impact • Community-Engaged • Workforce-Minded • Partnerships

Purpose: Expand opportunity and strengthen Western Connecticut's economic and cultural vitality. Connect education, community-engaged and workforce-minded partnerships, and community well-being.

Strategies:

1. Strengthen K-12, Transfer, & Community Pipelines

- Deepen partnerships with local schools and districts
- Expand tuition programs and transfer pathways
- Develop pre-college, early-college, weekend, accelerated, and summer programs

2. Develop Regional Academic & Business Innovation Hubs

- Develop hubs/clusters for talent needs and academic strengths
- Coordinated network linking K-12, CT State, employers, and community partners
- Explore recognition for high-quality, academically rigorous learning

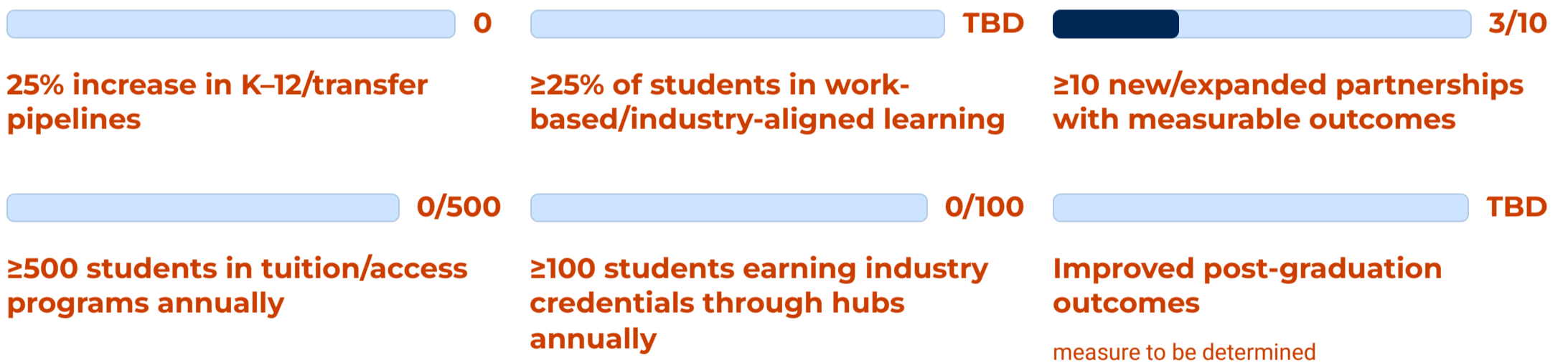
3. Expand Community-Engaged and Workforce-Minded Learning & Partnerships

- Credit-bearing applied learning across majors
- Assign value to training opportunities provided by employers
- Formalize partnerships in high-demand fields
- Grow employer partnerships, cohort-based pathways
- Expand public-service pipelines

4. Increase Regional Access & Affordability

- Scale tuition initiatives
- Pilot creative affordability by design tuition models
- Expand online/hybrid pathways for working adults

Indicators (to be finalized by team in next 30-90 days):



Operational Focus & Roles

To amplify our role as a regional anchor, we will strategically invest in fostering robust external relationships, cultivating deep community partnerships, and forging strong workforce connections. This approach ensures our educational offerings are directly aligned with regional needs, driving economic and cultural growth and enhancing community well-being. Our operational focus centers on collaboration, responsiveness, and impactful engagement across our work.

President/Senior Leaders

Build employer and community relations, advocate for the university, foster collaboration, convene business/civic/education leaders, align with community goals, secure investments and communicate impact

Academic Affairs/Deans

Develop outstanding programs using community data and workforce insights

Enrollment/Marketing

Expand pipelines, access initiatives, and reach new student populations.

Faculty

Integrate and embed applied learning, micro-credentials, and project-based work into academic offerings.

Staff

Support and facilitate internships, career placement, advising, and transfer navigation.

Students

Engage in internships, learning opportunities, credentials, and pathway programs.

Culture of Shared Leadership & Renewal

Focus: Trust • Transparency • Participation • Shared Responsibility

Purpose: Strengthen trust, communication, and shared governance; invest in people; address silos and communication gaps while building shared responsibility.

Strategies:

1. Foster Trust through Transparency & Shared Governance

- Predictable communication, regular updates, accessible shared information
- Strengthen consultation and shared governance structures
- Increase visibility and clarity on decisions, timelines, roles
- Ensure cross-divisional alignment and engagement

2. Invest in Leadership Development & Growth

- Launch campuswide leadership learning opportunities
- Expand professional development, particularly in data literacy, AI, advising, retention, and engagement
- Recognize teamwork, innovation, service
- Quick-impact initiatives to strengthen campus culture

3. Build Shared Responsibility & Purpose

- Clarify expectations for retention, advising, student success and associated systems
- Use evidence to inform improvements
- Reward collaboration, transparency, service
- Ensure clear roles, expectations, feedback loops

Indicators (to be finalized by team in next 30-90 days):

TBD

TBD

TBD

TBD

≥70% positive ratings on climate survey (trust, communication, belonging)

≥80% participation in governance, forums, development

10% improvement in faculty/staff retention

Increased cross-divisional participation

Operational Focus & Roles

Building a transparent and trusting campus culture requires intentional communication, clear processes, and persistent effort. This commitment serves as a foundational pillar, enabling the success of all other commitments by fostering an environment where collaboration thrives, innovation is encouraged, and shared goals are pursued effectively. Our operational focus emphasizes consistent practices and shared responsibility to build trust, alongside a strategic investment in people through robust professional development and leadership growth efforts.

Leadership (President & Senior Leadership)

Model transparency, share decisions openly, encourage feedback, structure collaboration, champion professional growth, and promote shared ownership

Supervisors / Managers

Clarify roles and expectations, provide feedback, and foster supportive, transparent environments

Faculty & Staff

Actively participate in governance, curriculum, climate initiatives, and student success; engage in professional development, teamwork, and culture-building; support collective ownership and shared responsibility

Students

Influence campus culture through leadership, feedback, and shared ownership

Creating a Campus Where Every Person Thrives

Focus: Belonging & Equity in Action • HSI Excellence

Purpose: Strengthen all other commitments by closing equity gaps, developing diverse talent, and ensuring inclusion. Model outcomes-driven belonging as Connecticut's largest public Hispanic-Serving Institution.

Strategies:

1. Close Equity & Achievement Gaps

- Monitor and assess equity outcomes regularly
- Expand comprehensive support for underrepresented students
- Provide targeted support to help near-graduate students complete their degrees
- Integrate equity considerations into major decision-making processes

2. Diversify & Develop Workforce

- Enhance training and leadership development opportunities
- Strengthen inclusive hiring practices
- Cultivate internal talent development pathways
- Establish strategic community-to-campus hiring partnerships
- Develop equity-focused leadership acceleration programs

3. Build Culture of Belonging & Psychological Safety

- Integrate inclusion, equity, and belonging into all development and services
- Regularly assess and respond to belonging sentiments
- Establish inclusive pedagogy and leadership development programs
- Promote and support equity-focused research
- Facilitate responsive leadership listening sessions and feedback loops
- Cultivate identity-affirming environments and programming
- Champion respect for diverse perspectives and dialogues

4. Advance Hispanic-Serving Mission & Regional Partnerships

- Establish initiatives to advance HSI innovation and leadership
- Assess and enhance the bilingual campus experience
- Engage Latino families in university pathways
- Expand programs supporting HSI scholars and bilingual pathways
- Pursue national recognition for HSI excellence, leveraging nationally recognized frameworks (e.g., *Excelencia* in Education) that elevate Latino student success and create transformative outcomes for all learners

Indicators (to be finalized by team in next 30-90 days):

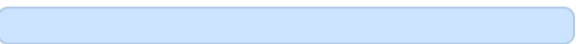
 **TBD**  **TBD**  **TBD**

Annual belonging/equity milestones met

TBD

URM retention gap \leq 3 percentage points by 2030

URM graduation gap \leq 4 percentage points by 2030

 **TBD**  **TBD**  **0/\$2**

Belonging Index \geq 85% by 2030

Supervisor training participation = 100%

HSI-related external funding \geq \$2M by 2030

 **TBD**  **No**

Faculty & Staff Diversity

TBD annual improvement benchmarks

Seal of Excelencia

Data, leadership, and practice framework from *Excelencia* in Education

Operational Focus & Roles

This commitment to belonging and equity is fundamental, as it underpins and amplifies the success of all other strategic initiatives. It necessitates integrating equity considerations into every facet of university operations, from planning and policy to daily practices. Our approach emphasizes data-driven decision-making and clear accountability to ensure measurable progress, recognizing that achieving true equity and inclusion is a shared responsibility across all members of our campus community.

President

Inclusive leadership; climate expectations; equity dashboard; accountability; campuswide integration

Senior Leadership

Align budget and policy with equity goals; ensure DEI visibility; advance belonging actions; monitor equity data; oversee service quality

Faculty

Practice inclusive pedagogy; provide mentorship; advance equity and student success; strengthen advisor/mentor roles

Staff

Advance belonging; improve climate and accessibility; support well-being; deliver high-quality student services; engage in training and collaboration

HR / ODEI / Student Affairs

Lead training; improve hiring practices; report on climate; coordinate belonging initiatives; integrate cross-group efforts

Students

Peer researchers; belonging ambassadors; cultural leaders; feedback; HSI engagement; mentorship