

CCSU Athletics

Preliminary Report of the Strategic Plan Working Group

Spring 2023

This Preliminary Report of the Athletics Strategic Plan Working Group is presented to elicit comments and suggestions from the Senate and the wider University community. It is based on the discussions of the Athletics Advisory Committee, comprised of fourteen members, including former Central student athletes, Athletics administrators, alumni, donors, and current instructional and administrative faculty.

The goal of the report and eventual final plan is to better explain how Athletics contributes to the University through the education of students involved in sports and supports the University's Strategic Plan and retention goals. It offers suggestions for how Athletics can continue to benefit CCSU at this critical moment and recommits Athletics to the educational mission of Central.

The Final Strategic Plan will undergo additional reviews and include more details and timelines. It is a work in progress. The purpose of this draft is to focus the Athletics department more clearly on achieving the wider educational goals of the University and developing a new strategy to increase enrollment and retention in these challenging times.

Members of the Athletics Advisory Committee

Tom Pincince, *Director of Athletics*
 Amy Strickland, *Associate AD / Senior Woman Administrator / Former CCSU student-athlete*
 Dr. Kathy Bantley, *Professor of Criminology / Former student-athlete / Faculty Athletic Representative*
 Stephanie Blozy, *CEO Fleet Feet (West Hartford)*
 Julie DeFalco, *CCSU Controller*
 CJ Jones, *Director of Athletics Emeritus / CCSU Sports Committee / Former CCSU student-athlete*
 Matt Riley, *Director, Corporate and Foundation Relations / Institutional Advancement*
 Tina Rivera, *Alum / IT Staff CCSU*
 Juan Roman, *Alum / Former CCSU student-athlete*
 Dan Salerno, *New Britain City Treasurer*
 Charlene Shepard, *Alum / Former CCSU student-athlete / CCSU Sports Committee*
 Dan Siracusa, *Alum / Former CCSU student-athlete / Owner, Siracusa Moving and Storage*
 Dr. John Tully, *Interim Special Assistant to the Provost / Distinguished Service Award Winner / Alum*
 Dr. Matthew Warshauer, *Professor of History / Distinguished Service Award Winner / Excellence in Teaching Award Winner / Alum*

Introduction:

There has long existed a national, and at CCSU, an institutional discussion about the value of university athletic programs. Some conclude that sports budgets unnecessarily drain much needed resources from academics and, especially today, with concerns over lower enrollments and reduced state funding, they question the type and range of athletic programs a school like CCSU should offer.

In 2017, CCSU's administration created a taskforce to explore such questions, focused particularly on whether CCSU should change its Division I status and eliminate certain sports teams. The taskforce determined that the university should remain Division I, and among other actions, the administration phased out the men's and women's golf teams.

This new CCSU Athletics Strategic Plan proposes that we continue the conversation and rethink the value of athletics programs at the university. For far too long a key aspect of the discussion has revolved around an imagined divide between the academic and athletic roles of our students. The reality is that Athletics has always been and remains a vital component of our university

community, contributing in many ways to both our students' and CCSU's development as a place of higher education.

Students involved in Athletics learn valuable lessons about teamwork, problem solving, community, diversity, and equity. As young scholars, they are often among our most well-rounded students, excelling in classrooms, living in the residence halls, getting involved in Student Government, campus clubs, and other organizations. They are the students most involved in service opportunities at CCSU and within our home city of New Britain. They graduate at higher rates with higher GPAs per capita than their non-athlete peers, while also earning the distinction of Dean's List and President's List honors.

Our students involved in Athletics are also one of the university's most important marketing tools. They wear CCSU blue everywhere they go, serving as constant reminders of the institution, not merely as athletes, but as representatives of virtually every academic major on campus.

Many of these students go on to become successful alums, working in or owning Connecticut businesses, taking part in our communities, as well as offering support and a lending hand in the lives of current students. These Blue Devils never forget the opportunities afforded them through their athletic and academic opportunities at CCSU.

Rather than a drain on much needed university resources, CCSU Athletics is a vital component of who we are as an institution. The students involved in athletic programs often represent our greatest goals in developing, as our university mission statement advocates, "thoughtful, responsible and successful citizens."

Understanding the Athletics Plan:

Given the unique contributions of these students to the University's mission and the ongoing educational goals of Athletics, this Strategic Plan does not follow the typical structure put forward by other institutions and programs. We want to be clear about the background, context, purpose, and experience of Athletics in fostering student success before outlining future steps designed to improve the financial stability and educational mission of the Division.

The Athletics Strategic Plan offers five key elements that address the discussion concerning the imagined divide between academics and athletics. It carefully identifies who our scholar athletes are, addresses misconceptions concerning the Athletics budget, and answers questions about scholarships and the revenue

versus expense related to athletic programs. It also offers a roadmap for the future of Athletics at CCSU.

We must also recognize that Division I athletes have choices about where they pursue an education, and the decision almost always revolves around both academic and athletic opportunities. Like many academic programs and other departments or divisions at CCSU, Athletics is not a net revenue producer, yet it is not the economic drain on resources that some contend.

The Five Elements of the Plan:

- I. Getting to Know CCSU's Scholar Athletes**
 - II. CCSU's Responsibilities to these Students**
 - III. How Values and Mission Align**
 - IV. Athletic Budgets and Value Added**
 - V. Challenges and Opportunities – Objectives and Timelines**
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I. Getting to Know CCSU's Scholar Athletes

Students involved in university Athletics are enrolled in majors and minors across the academic spectrum, in all four schools and colleges of the university, as well as in our graduate programs. These scholar athletes are often among our best and brightest students. Their graduation rates, GPAs, level of diversity, and commitment to service opportunities both within CCSU and in New Britain exceed their non-athlete peers.

Students involved in Athletics learn important lessons about:

- Teamwork and community
- Shared commitment
- Hard work and life challenges
- Leadership
- Integrity
- Responsibility and service
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion

These are the very same skills and lessons we teach in classrooms, internships, service-learning programs, Student Government, and clubs and organizations across the university. Athletics is an important component of these learning communities, not an addendum.

CCSU's Athletes are Students – The Numbers

- In the 2022-2023 academic year, 417 students participated in sports. Of these, 33 are graduate students. Together, they are approximately 7.1% of our full-time student population.
- Approximately 26% are students of color.
- They are enrolled in all four schools and across more than 38 majors.

CCSU is and has always been an institution of opportunity, especially for first generation and lower/middle income students. The same is true for the students who arrive at CCSU with the drive to engage in Division 1 athletics.

For the last four years, Athletics has averaged 50 students whose “Expected Family Contribution” was zero. For many of these students, their participation in Central sports has allowed them to unlock their potential with a university education. In addition, during this same period, Athletics has averaged 122 students who are Pell grant eligible.

Grade Point Average and Academic Awards

- For most the past five years, students participating in Athletics had a higher average cumulative GPA than their non-athlete peers, and in the past two years, that margin is higher than it was 5 years ago.

CCSU STUDENTS		
Academic Year	Cumulative GPA	Number
2017 - 2018	2.89	10,148
2018 - 2019	2.91	10,090
2019 - 2020	3.00	9,489
2020 - 2021	2.95	8,928
2021 - 2022	2.99	8,277

CCSU STUDENT ATHLETES		
Academic Year	Cumulative GPA	Number
2017 - 2018	2.91	432
2018 - 2019	2.88	405
2019 - 2020	3.00	400
2020 - 2021	3.01	392
2021 - 2022	3.05	407

In the last year available (2021-2022):

- 191 students who participated in Athletics had a GPA of 3.2 or higher. This represents almost half of all student athletes.
- 88 students were recognized as members of the Northeast Conference (NEC) Commissioner's Honor Roll, with GPAs of 3.75 or higher.
- 11 of the 16 teams had a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher.
- 7 students were named the NEC Scholar Athlete of the year for their respective sports, including one who was named the NEC co-Student Athlete of the Year.

Fall 2022 GPA's

Dean's List (3.5): 120 Presidents List (4.0): 29

Sport	GPA
Men's Baseball	2.95
Men's Basketball	2.73
Men's Cross Country	3.29
Men's Football	2.60
Men's Track & Field	3.07
Men's Soccer	3.40

Women's Basketball	3.33
Women's Cross Country	3.26
Women's Track & Field	3.21
Women's Lacrosse	3.34
Women's Soccer	3.30
Women's Softball	3.14
Women's Swimming	3.16
Women's Volleyball	3.37

- In the last five years, students participating in Athletics constituted 5.1% of all students on Dean's List and 4.8% of the students on the President's List.¹

Among Biology majors, student athletes accounted for 7.2% of those on the Dean's List.

Among Economics majors, student athletes accounted for 11.4% of those on the Dean's List.

Among Interdisciplinary Science majors, student athletes accounted for 10.0% of those on the Dean's List.

Among Journalism majors, student athletes accounted for 11.1% of those on the President's List.

- Student Athletes have won the President's Citation in three of the last five years. The award recognizes accomplishments and contributions that benefit the University, particularly academic success, significant volunteer contributions to other students and the larger University community, and leadership achievements.

¹ Dean's List recognition is awarded to full-time matriculated undergraduate students each semester who carry at least 12 academic credits, earned a 3.50 GPA (out of a possible 4.0), and who did not have any incomplete grades for the semester at the time grades were processed. Dean's List recognition is awarded to part-time matriculated undergraduate students only in the spring semesters (and then for those students who carry at least 12 academic credits for the academic year, earned a cumulative 3.50 GPA for this spring and previous fall semester, and who did not have any incomplete grades for the semester at the time grades were processed). President's List recognition is granted to students who earned a 4.00 GPA and meet the same eligibility requirements for Dean's List.

Athlete Retention, Graduation Rates, and Community Service

- In the last five available cohorts (Fall 2017 – Fall 2021), the average retention rate of first-time, full-time Student Athletes has been 81%, compared to 75% for all students.
- In five of six cohorts, students who participate in Athletics have had a higher graduation rate than their peers:

COHORT YEAR	INSTITUTION	ATHLETES
2015	55%	58%
2014	52%	50%
2013	57%	61%
2012	51%	68%
2011	52%	53%
2010	54%	56%

- Students participating in Central sports averaged 2,495 community service hours per year over the past five years, including two reduced years because of Covid.

Athletic Championships, Athlete, and Coaching Accolades

- Since 2014-2015, Central has won 33 NEC Team Championships, the most of any university in the conference. The next best school has only 21.
- In the last five years, Central has won 21 NEC Team Championships, again, the most of any university in the conference and 8 more than the second-place university.
- In 2021-2022, 12 Central students were named NEC Player of the Year and 5 Central coaches were named Coach of the Year in their respective sports.
- So far in academic year 2022-2023, Central athletes have won 3 NEC Championships.

CCSU's students involved in athletics are an integral part of the university's educational mission.

They are often among our best students, contributing to every academic school within the university. They increase our levels of diversity and inclusion, raise our retention and graduation rates, and provide unparalleled community service. In addition, these Blue Devils represent CCSU on the field, court, track, pool, and pitch, bringing distinction and championships to the school.

II. CCSU's Responsibilities to these Students

Since CCSU's founding in 1849, our campus community has always known that involvement in wider aspects of campus life is indispensable to learning. While an academic education is our core, we are also devoted to other aspects of student learning that impart lessons in collaboration, diversity, engagement, excellence, integrity, and responsibility. These are the attributes that develop well rounded citizens. Offering students alternative paths to learning and excelling is part of our responsibility.

The many lessons and successes (outlined in Section I) that our scholar athletes gain while participating in team sports through CCSU's athletic program are integral to the university's mission.

We must also remember that students engaged in athletics take on an added responsibility to the university. They make a commitment to work toward excellence and to represent CCSU with integrity. Those possessing the talent and drive needed to engage in Division 1 Athletics while also excelling in academics represent a unique community of learners. Just as these students have a responsibility to CCSU, the university has a responsibility to them.

III. How Values and Mission Align

CCSU's University Mission:

Central Connecticut State University is a community of learners dedicated to teaching and scholarship that emphasizes development and application of knowledge and ideas through research and outreach activities, and prepares students to be thoughtful, responsible and successful citizens. As a comprehensive public university, we provide broad access to quality degree programs at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels.

CCSU's Athletic Mission:

The Athletics Program is a community of educators and students jointly committed to excellence in the preparation of students to excel in the classroom, on the field of competition, and in their lives as contributing and successful members of the campus and of the community.

Northeast Conference Mission:

The Conference is committed to providing quality athletics competition integral to and consistent with its Member Institutions' academic missions. The Conference is dedicated to providing opportunities for student-athletes to achieve their fullest potential in the classroom, in athletic competition and in the community. The Conference ensures that personal development of its student-athlete is given the highest priority and that, in doing so, it shall uphold the principles of ethical conduct, sportsmanship and equity.

CCSU's athletic program supports both the University's and Conference's essential values and missions, as well as specific elements outlined in the university's Strategic Plan, which focuses on:

1. Enhancing academic excellence and preparing graduates who thrive in a changing economy

Section 1 of this Athletic Strategic Plan carefully assesses the academic diversity and success of the university's scholar athletes. The range of academic majors and minors is extensive, as is the academic excellence based on years of data regarding GPA and academic awards.

2. Increasing access to higher education and ensuring student success

Section 1 also outlines the extensive diversity that exists throughout the Athletics program. For many students, success in athletics at the high school level has made access to higher education a singular reality. Once these students arrive at CCSU, Athletics staff are dedicated to their success, not just as athletes, but as students and individuals. In addition to the many centers on campus that are devoted to student success and tutoring, the Athletics department monitors all scholar athletes by regularly reaching out to faculty, mandating study hall hours, and requiring a minimum GPA to take part in athletics training and competition. Ensuring success both on and off the field is the primary goal of CCSU Athletics.

3. Fostering an inclusive and safe campus culture that values and encourages individuals to participate in a free and respectful exchange of ideas

Athletics is devoted to inclusivity and development of a safe campus culture. This includes all aspects of our students' lives, from race, gender, and sexual orientation to community and political views. CCSU's athletes participate in a wide range of on-campus communities, live in our residence halls, and engage in events and ideas that exists well beyond their given team. They add to the broader experience of an inclusive university environment.

4. Strengthening stewardship by advancing scholarship, service learning, and community meant for the public good

The Athletic Strategic Plan clearly outlines the success of our scholar athletes, who have outstanding GPAs and consistently receive academic awards. Athletes also work with university faculty on original research and scholarship, taking that learning and experience into the community after graduating. Athletics also encourages students to take part in service and community engagement both within the university and in the wider New Britain community. Section 1 of the Plan provides specific data on the extent of this outreach.

5. Assuring financial sustainability for the future

Financial stability is vital to CCSU's success, and the initial element of this Strategic Plan specifically addresses the imagined disconnect between academics and athletics, and how budgetary concerns impact our thinking about the relevance of sports programs. Section IV of this Strategic Plan provides key data on the Athletics budget and future plans for revenue enhancement.

IV. Athletics Budgets and Value Added

The Athletics budget is one of the most scrutinized at the University. Unlike other important departments and services, all of which are also investments in our students' success, Athletics is often evaluated solely on a net fiscal gain/loss spectrum. It is therefore vital to provide a clearer evaluation of the budget as it relates to the University's mission and goals.

Athletics Budget

Like other departments and offices on campus, salaries and benefits are largely fixed and determined by collective bargaining and considered components of the larger university budget. Therefore, the Athletics budget consists of two parts: operating expenses and discretionary personnel services (part-timers); and student scholarships.

	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
Beginning Budget	\$4,400,000	\$4,566,880	\$3,802,156	\$3,440,756	\$3,560,756	\$4,220,621	\$3,863,121
Increases and (Reductions)	\$166,880	(\$764,724)	(\$361,400)	\$120,000	\$659,865	(\$357,500)	\$3,273
Total	\$4,566,880	\$3,802,156	\$3,440,756	\$3,560,756	\$4,220,621	\$3,863,121	\$3,866,394

As the data above indicate, the Athletics Department, like many on campus, has dealt with shrinking budgets and the need to cut costs.

As with other divisions on campus, and in alignment with University practices, Athletics has left several positions within the division vacant (assistant basketball coaches, administrative assistant, senior associate Athletics director, storekeeper, etc.) in order to ensure salary savings within the division and thus to the university. Savings over the last five years have been considerable.

FY18	\$282,480
FY19	\$108,598
FY20	\$140,549
FY21	\$283,482
FY22	\$541,981

The Department has been vigilant in past years about addressing coaching salaries that have been historically out of alignment with NEC averages. This includes making prudent decisions on salary levels for new hires.

Operating expenses are just that: the costs of operating the sports and support services for our students. This includes part-time salaries for coaches, trainers, and other support staff, as well as team travel expenses, home event expenses, as well as uniforms and equipment.

Scholarships account for a considerable component of the Athletics budget. For FY 22, scholarships stand at \$4.3 million, yet these monies are often the most misunderstood aspect of the budget. The reality is that only 14.3% of students

who participate in Athletics get what is considered a “full” scholarship.² Only 65% of students who participate in Athletics receive any Athletics aid at all.

More important, the most accurate way to understand the \$4.3 million in scholarships received by Athletics is to consider them as payments from the University to Athletics and then back to the university. This is done for budgetary clarity, but does not amount to an actual monetary cost to the university. In effect, what the scholarship amount transfers do is reduce the overall cost for a student to attend Central.

Let’s consider one possible example.³ The cost for attendance next year for a non-Connecticut resident first year student living in the residence halls with a meal plan is \$19,623 per semester (\$39,246 for the year). If that student were given a \$4,000/year scholarship, and as a result decided to attend Central, the total revenue to the University would increase by \$35,246.⁴ In effect, Athletic scholarships are enrollment incentives for potential students. Again, for budgetary purposes, the university adds that \$4,000 scholarship to the overall Athletics expenses in a given year.

- There is a widespread misunderstanding on campus that all students who participate in Athletics are on full scholarship, or “getting a free ride.” This is not the reality. In 2022-2023, only 59 students received a full athletic scholarship, 14.3% of the student athlete population. Many of these are in men’s and women’s basketball and football.
- Over 80% of student-athletes get a partial scholarship or no scholarship at all. Partial scholarships provide discounts to some fees, housing, or meal plan costs.
- The reality is that all \$4.3 million in scholarships goes directly back to the university. Additionally, since 2018, Athletics instituted a policy requiring that all undergraduate student athletes who receive more than half of an athletic scholarship must live in the residence halls. In effect, this means that a significant portion of the scholarship amount, which appears to be an expense on spreadsheets, is actually reinvested in the university.
- Perhaps most important is that a significant component of the current cost-analysis expense budget model of Athletics fails to calculate the

² A “Full Athletic Scholarship” is defined as tuition, fees, room and board, plus a loan of books.

³ Based on calculations from <https://www.ccsu.edu/bursar/fullTimeFees.html>

⁴ And while that full amount might also be reduced through grants or other scholarships, that is the case for students not participating in athletics as well.

actual revenue provided to the university when considering tuition and fees that are paid directly by student athletes.

- For example, if Student Athlete A receives a partial tuition waiver of \$5,000, the university still nets an additional student who contributes at least \$20,970 to the university.⁵

We must also recognize that the university's Division 1 Athletic program draws competitive scholar athletes who likely would not choose CCSU if it switched to a lower division.

Athletes and Enrollment:

- Enrollment remains a constant concern at CCSU. While overall student enrollment has been down approximately 18.5% over the past five years, there has not been a comparable drop in Athletics enrollment. Enrollment among Athletes has dropped by less than 6%. This 12.5% percentage point difference resulted in considerable income to the university.

Athletics Income, Fund Raising, and Alumni Giving

Athletics has always had a robust fundraising effort and been very successful in soliciting generous gifts from alumni. We will continue our ambitious marketing and advancement efforts moving forward.

We must also consider the income generated by Athletics. Part of that comes from NCAA funding, which is based on the number of sports sponsored (at CCSU this number is 16), and the total number of scholarships offered. Over the past five years, Athletics on average received \$226,890 annually from the NCAA.

- Over the past five years, Athletics has averaged 1,188 individual donors every year, bringing in an average of \$370,153, totaling \$1,850,765. These funds are deposited with the CCSU Foundation, and Athletics utilizes a portion of these funds to fund operations, reducing the reliance on University funding.
- Athletics has had similar success with corporate sponsors, averaging 26 corporate sponsors each year for the past five years, bringing in an average of \$138,410, totaling \$692,050.

⁵ Based on an in-state student bill of \$25,970.

- Together, Athletics has tapped individual donors and corporate sponsors for \$2,542,815 over the past five years.

V. Challenges and Opportunities – Objectives and Timelines

The primary challenge faced by CCSU Athletics is continuing to excel in educating students in a difficult budgetary environment. This is the same challenge faced by units across the university. How do we maintain our mission in the face of lower enrollment and dwindling state dollars?

The answer for some is to make fiscal cuts to Athletics. This, however, would be counterproductive, as students involved in sports help to maintain university retention and graduation rates, provide tuition and fees, as well as residence hall and meal plan dollars. After graduation, they provide significantly to alumni giving. Equally important, Central opens up our students' worlds and prepares them to be global citizens and to succeed in the economy.

To fulfill the educational mission of Athletics as an integral part of the University, the Department puts forward the following Objectives.

Objective #1

All members of CCSU Athletics will recommit themselves and their programs to continuing and exceeding the academic achievements outlined in this Plan.

As this Plan shows, students involved in Central sports are already outstanding members of the academic community. Over the next three years, Athletics leadership will ensure that the educational needs of our students remains the highest priority of every member of the Division.

Timeline:

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|--------------------|---|
| 2023 – 2024 | Institute regular workshops between coaches and academic advisors and academic support offices. |
| | Begin a comprehensive academic data collection system. |

2024 – 2025 Implement a standard “academic orientation” for all new members of Athletics staff.

In conjunction with the UAB, open a thorough review of “best practices” on academic support and motivation for student athletes.

2025 – 2026 Review academic data and make programmatic changes as necessary.

Objective #2

Utilize roster management and the exploration of adding additional sports to increase the number of students attending the university.

As earlier sections made clear, Central’s scholar athletes succeed in the classroom, win in their respective sports, enhance our campus in many ways, and provide valuable service to the community. As a successful and well-respected Division 1 Athletics program, Central receives far more inquiries from prospective student athletes than current roster sizes have accommodated. Part of the decision for earlier roster limits reflected a desire to maintain the competitive advantage, a need to work within the constraints of support staff like academic coaches and athletic trainers, and maintaining the ability of our coaches to provide individual attention, both athletically and personally, to our students.

However, given the extraordinary fiscal and budgetary environment moving forward, Athletics will gradually increase the number of **non-scholarship** student athletes across many men’s and women’s sports.

For every additional student athlete, the overall revenue to the university is \$25,970 for 2023-2024.⁶

⁶ This is a conservative estimate of revenue. Every student who enrolls at the NEBHE or out-of-state rate will increase the amount of tuition, room and board, and fees generated. OIRA estimates that every additional student raises the bottom line of the University by over \$10,000.

Timeline:

- 2023 – 2024** Prepare a detailed budget and implementation plan that details roster increases to Lacrosse, Women's Track and Field, Women's Swimming, Softball, and possibly other sports.
- Prepare a comprehensive budget and implementation plan that explores the benefits and potential revenue enhancement for the University of adding additional sports.
- 2024 – 2025** Implement a budget analysis data program to track the increased enrollment and expenditures. Review with coaching staffs the progress of the program.
- 2025 – 2026** Present a complete review of the program to the University.

Objective #3

Increase external revenue generation for scholarships through expanded and reimagined branding, marketing, and fund-raising efforts.

While this Plan has outlined the incredible revenue generation of Athletics over the past five years, which included the difficult pandemic years, we are now committing ourselves to assist the University meet student needs through a renewed emphasis on raising scholarship funds.

Timeline:

- 2023 – 2024** Create an Advisory Board for the effort, consisting of alumni, major donors, current students, New Britain leaders, and notable Connecticut residents and sports personalities.
- Work closely with Institutional Advancement and Marketing/Communications on coordinated strategies and goal-setting, all with the goal of maximizing the gift-giving impact on student scholarships in Athletics and across the university.
- 2024 – 2025** Begin implementation, with continuous monitoring and assessing of the various strategies

2025 – 2026 Continue assessment and present a complete review to the University.

NOTE:

As stated in the Introduction, this draft is designed to elicit comments and input from the Senate and the wider Central community. **The final version of the Strategic Plan will include more detailed timelines, strategies, and assessment mileposts once the major Objectives are in place.**

The final version will also reiterate and confirm the Division's core values as they relate to diversity, inclusion, and the University's mission and Strategic Plan.