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# 2025 University Goals

## Background/Introduction

NIU’s 2025 University Goals codify the university’s strategic priorities. Accordingly, these annual and multiyear goals are guided by our [Strategic Action Planning Framework](https://www.niu.edu/president/_pdf/planning-framework.pdf). In no particular order of importance, the themes associated with our planning framework are: 1) Empowerment and Shared Responsibility; 2) Student Recruitment, Student Success and Student Experience; 3) Academic Excellence and Curriculum Innovation; 4) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging; 5) Research, Scholarship, Artistry and Engagement; and 6) Resource Development and Fiscal Responsibility. The themes help not only to connect the goals to our university to mission, vision and values, but also to ensure that they reflect our priorities and highlight opportunities for synergy and coordinated effort.

General goals and specific objectives related to resource development and fiscal sustainability are included under each theme. It is imperative that the university community work together to achieve a balanced budget in FY26 by eliminating the existing structural budget deficit. In doing this, we will recognize that the value of our teaching, scholarship and engagement cannot be described simply in financial terms, but we will also acknowledge that our limited resources must be directed to meet the most critical needs of our students and pressing demands of our society. The status quo is not an option. Our Huskie community must commit to change.

## Model for Shared Leadership Framework at NIU diagram  Collaboration in: - Innovation/risk - Commit time/resources - Transparency/accountability  with core Culture of:  - mission - vision - values -collaboration - Theme 1: Empowerment and Shared Responsibility

NIU’s strategic action planning framework calls on the university to support the development of leaders; communicate transparently and effectively; create a culture of shared responsibility; and inspire actions that drive fiscal and environmental sustainability.

Shared leadership offers an encompassing framework to foster co-ownership of goals and adoption of processes that emphasize adaptability, interdependence and collaboration. Since 2023, NIU has been intentional about building capacity for shared leadership by working across our university community to strengthen skills and competencies for creating shared vision and goals; building consensus; generating feedback; navigating difficult conversations; and being self-aware. Last year’s goals focused on advancing a Huskie culture that centers and serves students, and that supports opportunities for university employees to become more empowered, adaptable and resilient. The 2025 goals build on this work.

### Goal 1A- Advance a Huskie culture that truly centers and serves students.

NIU’s mission, strategic action planning framework, strategic enrollment management (SEM) plans and equity statement call upon all employees to work in ways that are student-centric, equity-minded and that empower and recognize our students, talents and strengths. This goal seeks to strengthen our community’s shared understanding of what it means to be student-centric by implementing specific recommendations advanced by shared leadership groups, and introducing new guidance and tools designed to support decision-making.

* Employee Well-being will develop and offer training programs emphasizing student-centered approaches and fostering a work environment dedicated to student success. Training will illustrate ways to achieve positive outcomes by defining success criteria and providing continuous feedback. (This is a continuation of work initiated under 2024 University Goal 1A; completion expected by March 2025)
* Divisions across campus will collaborate with HRS to create and implement for all staff employees a universal performance factor focused on student-success within their context. This will be accomplished in coordination with the planned implementation of ePerformance in the PeopleSoft solution. (This is a continuation of work initiated under 2024 University Goal 1A; completion expected by June 2025)
* As part of the process for building FY26 budgets, units will be provided with tools and guidance to support student-centered planning, budgeting and resource prioritization decisions. (This goal is synergistic with objectives under Theme 6A, and aligned with [recommendations](https://www.niu.edu/president/_pdf/budget-planning-report.pdf) received from the 2022 Budget Planning Resource Group; the expected timeline is Spring 2025.)

### Goal 1B- Foster an environment of meaningful engagement, mutual respect and Huskie pride.

NIU recognizes that providing educational excellence for our students also means finding ways to empower, encourage and support our faculty and staff. We want employees to grow, be engaged and feel a strong sense of satisfaction and pride.

NIU will continue to foster a culture of cooperation and common purpose across administrative, academic and front-line staff, consistent with NIU’s commitments to shared leadership and shared governance. Efforts to this end will also be informed by the leadership development framework created in 2024 by employee working group (see [Appendix A](#AppendixA)).

Meaningful faculty and staff engagement empowers individuals and teams to act on our university’s priorities; to advance a Huskie culture that truly centers on and serves students; and to achieve a structurally balanced budget in FY26. We will achieve these critical outcomes by soliciting the participation, and respecting the expertise, of leaders from across the university, including individuals who are not typically considered to hold positions of authority.

* Employee Well-being will develop supervisor and employee training activities focused on leadership development in the areas the working group identified as crucial. The group created a [framework](#AppendixA) by mapping specific characteristics and competencies to five core values associated with effective leaders: mission-focused approach to work; integrity and reliability; emotional intelligence; decision-making; adaptability. (This is a continuation of work initiated under 2024 University Goal 1B.)
* NIU will support new and ongoing initiatives designed to involve shared leadership and shared governance groups and principles in conversations and decision-making around resources, space and budget. University leaders will continue to convene the advisory group known as the President’s Budget Roundtable. In addition, the president, provost and vice president of Administration and Finance will support efforts to establish a permanent committee of University Council to engage with resources, space and budget through the shared governance model.
* NIU will continue to assess engagement and effectiveness of shared leadership efforts by tracking improvement over time in these categories of the annual Great Colleges survey: Job satisfaction and support; Professional development; Faculty and staff well-being; Collaboration; Mission and pride.

## Theme 2: Student Recruitment, Student Success and Student Experience

NIU is committed to attracting, retaining and graduating students representing the diversity of our region, nation and world. Our current Strategic Enrollment Management Plan ([SEM 2.0](https://www.niu.edu/enrollment-plan/sem2/index.shtml)) outlines the goals and supporting strategies that we must act upon to be successful at achieving a total enrollment that reflects our public mission and values, addresses the needs of our region and state and positions NIU for fiscal sustainability. The plan emphasizes promoting the value of an NIU education, improving access and affordability, and supporting students to, through and beyond graduation.

The university’s future depends on our success at recruiting and graduating new students who are completing high school, transferring from community college, re-enrolling after stopping out of higher education, or seeking graduate or law degrees. Accordingly, NIU will continue to strive to grow and stabilize enrollment. Our efforts will be guided by strategies and targets in SEM 2.0 and related plans and informed by the successes and challenges we have experienced working toward the previous years’ enrollment goals. We will continue to endeavor being student-centric in every interaction and transaction, and to cultivate a campus-wide culture focused on student success and “servingness.” In this context, it is important to note that the goals reflect student voices, their changing needs and their ideas for the future, while also reflecting the university’s financial imperatives.

### Goal 2A- Increase Enrollment and Enhance Student Success

With respect to recruitment, we will:

* Continue to refine strategies and tactics to prioritize student-centric approaches that effectively showcase the exceptional quality of our academic programs. Our actions will include:
	+ Developing and implementing tailored recruitment and marketing plans, including strategies for attracting and serving online degree seekers. (This is a multiyear goal that builds on work done in 2024.)
	+ Further executing the community college strategy developed during 2024.
	+ Continuing to develop marketing materials that showcase NIU’s value proposition and many strengths, including academic excellence, affordability and positive career outcomes. (This is a multiyear goal that builds on work done in 2024.)
	+ Strengthening partnerships with school districts by forging deeper connections to high school counselors and creating innovative enrollment opportunities specifically related to college- and career-pathways programs. (This is a multiyear goal that builds on work done in 2024.)
	+ Enhancing graduate student recruitment efforts. (This is a multiyear goal that builds on work done in 2024.)
* Review and revise strategies for awarding financial aid and scholarships to ensure our approaches are effective at attracting students, supporting their success and positioning the university for long-term fiscal sustainability. We will conduct a comprehensive review of NIU scholarship/waiver policies and use multiyear modeling to optimize outcomes associated with the award of institutional aid.

With respect to student academic and career success, we will:

* Continue to reduce organizational barriers to student success, informed by our previous successes and challenges at identifying and expanding institutional practices that support students to achieve their academic goals, improve low success rates and diminish equity gaps in introductory and prerequisite courses.
	+ Deploy and socialize the comprehensive student success model developed by leaders in Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ADEI) to highlight effective strategies implemented at the levels of the university, colleges, departments/schools and programs. [Figure in [Appendix B](#AppendixB)]
	+ Increase retention rates for first-time, full-time students who are first-generation and/or from low-income backgrounds or marginalized communities, taking advantage of resources provided by learning communities such as FirstGen Forward Network, lessons learned from successful programs such as Rockford Promise and NIU’s Higher Learning Commission Quality Initiative as well as general education initiatives such as the Math Assistance Center, effective pedagogical practices and supplemental instruction. Notably, this objective is supported not only by our commitment to improving academic and non-academic support for all students, but also by the plans to review and revise institutional aid strategies.
	+ Fulfill our potential to be designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) that is recognized for serving, supporting and accelerating the success of Latinx students and all students. To this end, NIU will adopt the [Seal of Excelencia](https://www.edexcelencia.org/seal/seal-excelencia-framework) framework to align core components of data (enrollment, retention, transfer, financial support, representation, degree completion), practice (enrollment, retention, transfer, financial support, representation, degree completion) and leadership (mission and strategy, data and practice, human resources, communications, institutional culture).
	+ Continue to strengthen and evolve career-focused student engagement opportunities, including the Braven partnership, by incorporating effective practices and responding positively to student feedback. NIU must be intentional about helping students build the skills, confidence, experiences and networks that will support their transition to strong first jobs and/or graduate school placements
* Achieve total enrollment that exceeds the Fall 2024 10-day census, understanding that headcount is inclusive of many groups, including undergraduates, graduate and professional students; new freshmen; transfer students; international students; students-at-large, students returning after stopping out; students residing on-campus; and students enrolled fully online.
	+ Fails to meet expectations/fails to show progress < 15,416
	+ 15,416 ≤ Meets expectations and shows progress ≤ 15,626
	+ Exceeds expectations > 15,626

### Goal 2B- Continue to Make our Student Experience More Equitable and Engaging

* Use shared leadership to advance a culture that truly centers and serves students (see related Goal 1A).
* Continue to build a community of care that demonstrates compassion, empathy and care for our students and emphasizes mental health and well-being as a collective responsibility and priority for our campus community, building on the actions in 2024 to support students’ mental and emotional health needs and wellness:
	+ Continue collaboration with [JED Campus](https://www.jedcampus.org/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiApNW6BhD5ARIsACmEbkXfm9Jb65qvb-t0QNa0iNfQM3z9hRJAef_vdjeJrCJocahrVk6fZNsaAsitEALw_wcB) for Year 3 implementation, responding to recommendations for strengthening programs, policies and trainings designed to protect student mental health, build life skills and support students who might be struggling.
	+ Continue to support campus campaigns, policies and practices that increase mental health awareness and decrease stigma about utilizing counseling and wellness support among all students, particularly members of marginalized communities.
* Advance student-centric planning, budgeting and resource prioritization.
	+ Provide units with tools and guidance to support student-centered planning, budgeting and resource prioritization decisions (see related Goal 1A).
	+ Improve systems that support student activities and organizations inclusive of, but not limited to, those based on academic, professional or cultural interests, fraternity and sorority membership, community service, recreational sports, programing and/or performing. Benchmark NIU processes against those of peer institutions and use data to inform recommendations for enhancing our approach to funding the different types of student activities and organizations that foster connection and belonging. These efforts recognize NIU’s longstanding commitment to the stewardship of student organization activity through its vibrant Student Government Association and build upon recent initiatives to revitalize Greek Life at NIU.
	+ Improve efficacy of NIU programs focused on sex-based misconduct support, response and prevention to better serve faculty, students and staff. Complete a comprehensive review of current practices and resources related to oversight, consultation, education, communications and training around the topics of Title IX, healthy relationships and consent awareness, including the communications and administration of complaint procedures for faculty, staff, students and third parties in the areas of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking. Initiate action on recommendations in 2025.

## Theme 3: Academic Excellence and Curriculum Innovation

The promise of progress and prosperity beyond degree completion is what inspires students to pursue higher education. Worried about their futures and influenced by growing public skepticism regarding the value of higher education, undergraduate and graduate students are increasingly concerned about how their degree programs will prepare them for meaningful careers and provide them with the opportunity for economic security. They seek academic programs and experiences that will help them develop the knowledge and skills to thrive in professional settings that are changing rapidly. They also expect higher education to prepare them to be responsible citizens, capable of solving complex problems that impact their families and communities. Recent brand perception studies affirm that students and families prioritize career outcomes as a critical factor in choosing a university. This presents NIU with a powerful opportunity to distinguish ourselves by intentionally aligning our programs and services with these expectations.

NIU is committed to supporting and enhancing the academic, career and civic aspirations of undergraduate and graduate students, including their interest in strong skill development, and their desire to discover and develop innovative solutions to complex societal problems. In this context, we are continuously pursuing improvements to our programs, policies and practices while simultaneously working to overcome structural barriers that inhibit transdisciplinary scholarship, impede curricular innovation and experimentation and discourage direct linkage of academic pursuits to career preparedness.

By intentionally addressing these priorities, NIU is positioned not only to meet the needs of today’s students, but also to help redefine the value of higher education. Through these efforts, we empower all Huskies to achieve their full potential and make lasting impacts on their communities and beyond.

### Goal 3A- Strengthen Undergraduate Programs, Enhance Undergraduate Student Experience

* Revise processes and timelines associated with oversight of academic degree programs to enhance planning and decision making about the programs and provide annual updates to the Board of Trustees on key indicators of program health. Shared governance groups will play a key role in process revision and template design.
* Continue to enhance the quality of pedagogy, assessment methods and engaged learning opportunities in all classes to support student academic success.
* Continue to support curriculum and co-curricular enhancements that strengthen connections between curriculum, skill development and career preparedness through the following actions:
	+ Continue to implement the Enriching the Design of General Education initiative to promote excellence in teaching and support faculty who design and offer general education courses, helping them to balance and integrate the three fundamental purposes of our general education program, skills, knowledge and exploration. (This goal builds on work initiated during the 2024-25 academic year.)
	+ Consider opportunities for increasing undergraduate student participation in career preparation courses and programs to support and enhance student academic success and post-graduation outcomes. (This goal is synergistic with Goal 2A.)

### Goal 3B- Encourage Transdisciplinary Scholarship and Curricular Innovation

* Continue to build capacity for transdisciplinary scholarship and curricular innovation through the following actions:
* Continue to reduce administrative barriers to transdisciplinary team teaching, curricular experimentation and development of transdisciplinary courses and programs. Continue work focused on creating streamlined pathways to develop curriculum for transdisciplinary courses and programs. Examples: a “curricular innovation sandbox” to provide space for developing and testing courses efficiently without requiring a full-course approval process; general course numbering method for interdisciplinary courses; competitive funding to support transdisciplinary endeavors.
* Launch a new website under the leadership of the vice provost for Faculty Affairs as a resource to support shared governance and academic units in modernizing NIU’s faculty tenure, promotion and evaluation practices, making them more inclusive of diverse and evolving faculty work.
* Identify pathways for cluster hiring compatible with our resource constrained environment, focusing on development of transdisciplinary teaching and research initiatives related to the Northern Illinois Center for Community Sustainability (NICCS), Data Science Initiative or Baustert Bahwell Health Technology Center. These areas were identified for cluster hires because NIU has established expertise – faculty from multiple colleges are actively engaged in planning – and there are prospects for donor and grant support. Collaboration across Academic Affairs, and between that division and Research and Innovation Partnerships (RIPS), will be required to identify resources and propose the means for achieving the shared vision through a combination of new investment and resource reallocation.

### Goal 3C- Strengthen Graduate and International Programs, Enhance Graduate and International Student Experiences

NIU will work collaboratively with campus stakeholders including the Graduate Council, Graduate School Student Advisory Council and Academic Affairs leadership, including deans and chairs/directors, to execute a multiyear plan designed to strengthen graduate programs and enhance the graduate student experience, continuing work initiated in conjunction with the Academic Year 2021-2 University Goals. These efforts will be guided by the Graduate School’s strategic enrollment priorities and its focus on marketing and recruitment, modernization of admissions processes and strengthening services that support student success. Our accomplishments to date provide a strong foundation for continued success. The Graduate School has responded to previous years’ goals by refreshing the website; implementing a CRM to manage applications and provide for personalized communication; and expanding graduate engagement and professional development opportunities.

We will also hire a new permanent dean of the graduate school and restructure organizational support for international programs to more effectively promote the academic success and experiences of international students and scholars. Goals and strategies specific to graduate and international education are detailed below.

#### Graduate Education

* Enhance and formalize graduate student recruitment efforts.
	+ Develop and deploy graduate student recruitment strategies and campaigns that use program-specific content, career outcomes data, testimonials and program distinctives to support recruitment efforts.
	+ Develop and begin to implement Graduate Enrollment Management (GEM) plans using best practice templates.
	+ Continue to recruit current NIU undergraduates into graduate programs, including those with accelerated degree pathways.
* Revise processes and timelines associated with oversight of academic degree programs to enhance planning and decision-making about the programs, and provide annual updates to the Board of Trustees on key indicators of program health. Shared governance groups will play a key role in process revision and template design.
* Support graduate student success by providing resources to support strong, strategic graduate programs.
	+ Continue to review current programs and services to assess their effectiveness in meeting our students’ academic support, writing, research, professional development and career needs. Use actionable data to identify and act on opportunities for improvement.
	+ Continue efforts to create competitive graduate student recruitment offers and compensation packages that reflect reasonable institutional responsibility and that align with program and discipline expectations and benchmarks. Compare NIU stipends, tuition and fees waivers with those of peers (by discipline), and use actionable data to establish compensation expectations that can be built into budgets over a realistic timeline.
	+ Continue efforts to use data/metrics to guide program investment and resource reallocation.
	+ Identify and leverage opportunities to lower degree costs by course-sharing to meet common requirements.

#### International Education

* Continue to pursue international partnerships to increase student enrollment.
	+ Create a structure to engage the colleges with international recruitment and other international opportunities.
	+ Build/strengthen partnerships to support recruitment and retention of international students.
	+ Develop/formalize region-specific recruitment plans and marketing strategies.
* Review the structure and strategies used to support recruitment, retention, success and community connectedness of international students, faculty and staff.

## Theme 4: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

NIU’s overall commitment, progress and accomplishments related to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) are recognized nationally. For example, the university received the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine in 2024 for a fourth consecutive year, gaining for the first time an additional designation of Diversity Champion, an honor reserved for institutions that exemplify an unwavering commitment to inclusive excellence across academic programs, throughout their campus communities and at the highest administrative levels. We appreciate being acknowledged for our progress advancing DEIB through programs, policies, practices and culture; however, we also know that we have more work to do to achieve living, learning and working environments where all individuals feel affirmed, irrespective of identity, viewpoint or lived experience.

NIU is committed to policies and practices that support the academic success of students; bolster professional development and career progression of our faculty and staff; and engage partners certified by the Business Enterprise Program (BEP). We appreciate that welcoming a wide range of worldviews, backgrounds and experiences is critical to open inquiry and intellectual vibrancy. We understand the strong association between a sense of belonging and positive academic, social and mental health outcomes. Accordingly, the university is dedicated to ensuring that all members of the Huskie community feel welcome, valued and respected.

### Goal 4A- Improve outcomes for all students by identifying and adopting effective practices that improve the academic success and student experiences of underserved populations.

NIU prizes the effective collaboration that occurs among leaders in the divisions of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ADEI), and across the units that report to them, including the important work done by the college equity coordinators. They work with intent and purpose to address the challenges faced by all our students, including those who are first-generation and/or from low-income backgrounds or marginalized communities. In 2025, NIU will sustain a strong focus on reducing organizational barriers to student success and closing achievement gaps. Because efforts to this end are coordinated and integrated across the university, the objectives under this goal overlap substantially with those under Goal 2:

* Deploy and socialize the comprehensive student success model developed by leaders in Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and ADEI to highlight effective strategies implemented at the levels of the university, colleges, departments/schools and programs. [Figure in [Appendix B](#AppendixB)]
* Continue to reduce obstacles to student success and expand institutional practices that improve low success rates and diminish academic achievement gaps. Adopt approaches that prioritize belonging, leadership development and academic success for all Huskie students; use quantitative and qualitative data to inform practice; and embrace assessment for continuous improvement.
* Increase retention rates for first-time, full-time students who are first-generation and/or from low-income backgrounds or marginalized communities, taking advantage of resources provided by learning communities such as FirstGen Forward Network, lessons learned from successful programs such as Rockford Promise and NIU’s Higher Learning Commission Quality Initiative as well as general education initiatives such as the Math Assistance Center, effective pedagogical practices, and supplemental instruction. This objective supports our commitment to improving academic and non-academic support for all students.
* Fulfill our potential to be designated as an HSI recognized for serving, supporting and accelerating the success of Latinx students and all students. Adopt the [Seal of Excelencia framework](https://www.edexcelencia.org/seal/seal-excelencia-framework) to align core components of data (enrollment, retention, transfer, financial support, representation, degree completion), practice (enrollment, retention, transfer, financial support, representation, degree completion) and leadership (mission and strategy, data and practice, human resources, communications, institutional culture). Use the knowledge gained through collaboration with Excelencia to strengthen NIU as a learning environment where Latinx (and all) students thrive.

### Goal 4B- Engage Campus in Activities that reinforce the 2024 Real Talk Conference Theme, “Opening Pathways to Embrace Our Humanity”

NIU is proud that the diversity of our student body reflects the changing face of our region and nation. The NIU community benefits from the strengths our students bring with them, as well as from their academic engagement and social involvement. Moreover, we see exceptional value in the combination of students’ diverse lived experiences and a learning environment supportive of the free expression and exchange of ideas. We have unrivaled opportunity to prepare students to be critical thinkers, compassionate leaders, successful professionals and members of a thriving democracy, and we seek to achieve these outcomes by following the guidance of our Strategic Action Planning Framework and committing to civil discourse and conversation that is intended to enhance understanding.

* Strengthen our community’s understanding of unique perspectives and experiences by expanding opportunities for authentic sharing of, and deep listening to, personal narratives.
* Leverage the new ViewFinder Climate Study Dashboard to dive more deeply into results from the most recent climate study. The new dashboard format allows us to more easily glean insights to inform actions.
* Select a theme and build programming for the 2025 Real Talk Conference at NIU.

## Theme 5: Research, Scholarship, Artistry and Engagement

NIU consistently aspires to be not only academically excellent but also recognized and respected for impactful and inclusive research, scholarship, artistry and engagement. We are proud of our identity as a Carnegie doctoral granting, high research activity (R2) university; our designation as a Carnegie Community Engagement institution; and our recognition by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) as an Innovation and Economic Prosperity University.

These acknowledgements reflect the university’s investment in knowledge creation, student experiential learning and effective community partnership, as well as the excellence of our faculty and staff. Yet, the impact of their work could be multiplied through more-intentional transdisciplinary collaboration and greater public engagement. The APLU has challenged public research universities to modernize scholarship for the public good, and NIU has already been moving in this direction. These university goals further our commitment to a more-supportive environment for non-traditional scholarly work at NIU, including work that is community-engaged, entrepreneurial, equity-oriented and transdisciplinary. In addition, they demonstrate our dedication to the concept and practice of sustainability.

### Goal 5A- Strengthen Infrastructure for Research/Artistry/Engagement

NIU strives to prepare our students and the communities we serve for a century of change by bringing our resources to bear on complex societal challenges. We empower teams made up of faculty, staff and students with diverse and relevant experiences to think and act creatively. NIU scholars are focused on responding to environmental change, advancing technology, preparing for shifting demographics and interpreting the world around us. They have had great success working with stakeholders across sectors to advance the discovery and application of new knowledge. Their impact could be amplified if provided with additional opportunities for capacity-building and more robust infrastructure to support the proposal and execution of complex, externally funded projects. These efforts include ensuring that the funding model supporting research, artistry and engagement is responsive to the complexity of the current environment from inflationary pressures to a shifting external funding landscape. In this context, the following actions will be pursued in 2025:

* Enhance the capabilities of NIU’s research and creative activities, by increasing support for faculty development in grant procurement.
	+ Refocus the Office of Research Development to be high-touch partners for faculty, with an emphasis on increasing strategic support of grant development by supporting collaborator identification and long-term planning for research/creative activity.
	+ Expand NIU programming designed to directly aid faculty grantsmanship; for example, by launching a university grants academy.
	+ Develop and strengthen partnerships with external networks to increase collaboration opportunities for NIU’s creative, research-active and externally engaged faculty. Specifically, work to connect faculty with external collaborators who participate in national (ex: Volare, FermiForward) and state/regional (ex: Illinois Innovation Network, Chicago Quantum Exchange) networks and initiatives.
* Develop standards of policies, procedures and institutional best practices to shift grantsmanship culture to increase grant funding utilized for buying-out university funding time. In other words, this would increase the amount of grant funding expended for NIU-funded personnel time when applicable to the program.
* Develop a funding model and process for launching a thematic cluster hire in FY26. As noted under related Goal 3B, collaboration among the provost, vice president of RIPS and deans will be required to solidify an actionable plan.
* Continue to advance community engagement as a central and essential element of NIU’s mission by supporting the [Engagement Roundtable](https://www.niu.edu/outreach/community-engagement/engagement-roundtable.shtml) and implementation of the 2023-26 [Engagement Action Plan](https://www.niu.edu/outreach/pdf/engagement-task-force-report-aug-23.pdf). Specifically, in 2025, NIU will:
	+ Apply for continued designation of NIU as a Carnegie Engaged Institution by the established deadline of April 1, 2025.
	+ Capitalize on momentum around recognition and institutionalization of community engagement.
		- Implement paths for [community-engaged course](https://www.niu.edu/academicaffairs/undergraduate-affairs/community-engaged-courses.shtml) designation.
		- Continue to provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff around community and civic engagement; publicly engaged and publicly impactful scholarship; student engagement; and service learning.
		- Elevate community engagement projects as opportunities for philanthropic funding, through inclusion in Huskie Trek Talks and the fundraising campaign case for support.
		- Identify faculty fellow with skills and interest to study implementation of the engagement action plan.
	+ Continue to develop institutional tracking and evaluation mechanisms for community engagement that will inform goal-setting and progress evaluation and demonstrate the collective impact of NIU and its partners to our community and key external audiences.

### Goal 5B- Advance NICCS and Sustainability Initiatives

The Northern Illinois Center for Community Sustainability (NICCS) will be a destination for subject matter experts external and internal to NIU, along with government and business leaders, graduate and undergraduate students and citizens working to enhance sustainability in their communities. NICCS will expand opportunities to create knowledge related to food systems, water resources and environmental change; inform sustainability policy; and educate the next generation of environmental scientists and stewards. In this context, the following objectives have been established for 2025:

* Continue to move the NICCS design-build process forward as allowed by the Capital Development Board.
* Highlight NICCS as a marquee philanthropic opportunity in the leadership and public phases of the comprehensive fundraising campaign.
* Continue campus sustainability efforts; for example, by implementing the NIU-Trane Energy Savings Agreement, continuing prairie restoration efforts, pursuing opportunities to participate in community solar and joining the [Atlas Zero Waste](https://www.postlandfill.org/atlas) program. NIU is particularly interested in sustainability efforts with the potential to lead to new revenue or reduce operating expenses over time.
* Develop and recruit faculty teams under the umbrella of NICCS, and submit federal funding applications to support work in all three pillars of NICCS mission.

## Theme 6: Resource Development and Fiscal Responsibility

NIU is committed to operating budgets that are academically responsive and fiscally responsible; that reflect our dedication to being student-centric;that demonstrate an ongoing investment in our faculty and staff; and that align with our mission, vision and values. Our FY25 budget projects a deficit of $15.4 million, approximately half of the deficit at the end of FY24. NIU made significant progress mitigating the deficit by managing recurring revenues and expenses, increasing revenue generation, and reallocating existing resources, specifically through concerted efforts to make more strategic personnel decisions, pursue academic efficiencies, increase net tuition revenue and optimize facilities usage. Our work is far from done, and we will need to change the way we operate to achieve a structurally balanced budget by FY26.

To achieve this end, we will continue to engage in an annual budget process aligned with that of the State of Illinois, while simultaneously identifying and implementing strategies to eliminate the budget deficit by the end of FY26. We will be guided by the recommendations of the 2022 Budget Planning Resource Group and feedback from shared leadership and shared governance groups as we make the changes needed to control costs and grow revenue in ways that are sustainable.

### Goal 6A- Ensure Fiscal Sustainability and Achieve a Balanced Budget by FY26

* Continue to advocate to the State of Illinois for adequate, equitable, and sustainable state support of NIU.
* Continue to engage Board of Trustees in the planning/budget process through quarterly budget updates and regular, meaningful dialogue about progress on achieving university goals.
* Collaborate with the university community to develop and implement processes for accomplishing fiscal imperatives, including establishing expense-reduction targets and expectations for gainsharing and shared savings.
* Connect strategic personnel processes to deficit-mitigation and fiscal sustainability by evaluating and implementing opportunities to:
	+ Integrate reorganizations, promotions, management-driven job position changes and enhancements into the annual budget process. The overarching goals are to enhance alignment of personnel changes with university goals and priorities; improve financial efficiency by allowing division leaders to more easily identify strategic options for investment of limited resources; and foster more transparent, equitable processes for promotions and job changes by reducing ad-hoc, off-cycle decisions and any associated real or perceived biases.
	+ Drive shared service models and reorganization by requiring vice presidential approval to advance requests to refill vacated positions, as well as documentation of the process used to assess alternative options.
	+ Leverage efficiencies associated with technology implementation by revising position descriptions and reassigning duties to reduce need for refilling positions.
	+ Pursue opportunities to create shared services in areas that might include, but are not limited to, support for travel transactions, information technology, business and administrative office functions.
	+ Increase awareness and benefits of NIU’s existing phased retirement option to retirement-eligible employees who prefer to continue working part-time without losing benefits. This program allows the university to reduce labor costs while retaining skills and talent during transitions.
* Reduce expenses/enhance stewardship of university resources.
	+ Encourage prudent, efficient and equitable use of university resources for travel.
	+ Control costs associated with speakers and catered events by increasing collaboration and modifying expectations.
	+ Establish policies and sustainability goals to drive down amount of non-instructional printing.
* Introduce New Budgets and Budget Development Processes for FY26.
	+ Rebuild FY26 budgets using modified zero-based budgeting.
	+ Implement all-funds budget model with clear expectations regarding incentives, gainsharing and shared savings.
	+ Promote accountability through a new website designed to enhance employee understanding of budgeting, resources and planning, and inform fiscally responsible decisions.

### Goal 6B- Advance Facilities and Technology Planning Priorities

* Advance state capital projects including NICCS and the Baustert Bahwell Health Technology Center.
* Advocate for release of state funding for capital improvement.
* Fully deploy the NIU Master Planning Framework in the campus capital planning advisory group to guide capital planning and align facilities and technology projects with our strategic priorities.
* Increase revenue generation and/or reduce expenses through streamlining and maximizing facilities usage. This will include, but not be limited to, implementation of the NIU-Trane Energy Savings Agreement (see goal 5B).

### Goal 6C- Fundraising and Campaign Execution

* Continue to maintain an innovation fund outside of the university’s operations and maintenance budget, and to highlight NIU innovation in donor events such as Huskie Trek Talks.
* Advance NIU’s comprehensive fundraising campaign to the public stage. Achieve $60 million in total philanthropy.
* Support and facilitate seamless leadership transitions for University Advancement and the NIU Foundation.

## Appendix A

### Framework for Effective and Ethical Leaders

From the conversations of the group, a framework was developed in five key areas:

* Student-Centered Approach to Work.
* Integrity and Reliability.
* Emotional Intelligence.
* Decision-making.
* Adaptability.

The framework below outlines the core values of effective and ethical leadership, followed by characteristics and competencies.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Core Value of Effective and Ethical Leaders**  | **Characteristics**  | **Competencies**  |
| **Mission Focused Approach to Work** | * Mission-focused
* Empathy
* Growth Mindset
* Values diversity
* Student-centered approach to work
 | * Creates a sense of succeeding together.
* Understands student-centered approaches within context of their own role and role of their team.
 |
| **Integrity and Reliability**  | * Accountability
* Authenticity
* Follow-through
* Respectful
 | * Demonstrates trustworthiness.
* Builds relationships within interpersonal needs of team.
 |
| **Emotional Intelligence**  | * Self-knowledge
* Self-discipline
* Active listening
* Empathy
* Mindful
 | * Recognizes talents in others.
* Places needs of team ahead of personal.
* Demonstrates strong skills on providing feedback and coaching to their team.
 |
| **Decision-making**  | * Proactive
* Creative
* Consistency
* Clear communications
* Collaborator
 | * Actively develops leadership skills.
* Actively encourages diverse perspectives.
* Demonstrates effective understanding in meeting team needs.
 |
| **Adaptability**  | * Flexibility
* Open to change
 | * Understands work dynamics and interpersonal skills of team.
* Develops self and others.
 |

### Next Steps

The next step for the framework is for Human Resource Services to develop an ongoing series of training activities focused on leadership development in these core areas as well as adding this model into the performance management process for leadership.

At the core of these initiatives are providing feedback and setting goals; demonstrating exemplary behaviors and encouraging them in others; supplying mentors and coaches for performance and retention; and consistently growing personal leadership skills.

The target date for the deployment of training is Spring 2025.

## Appendix B



