RIO SALADO COLLEGE

A MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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RIO SALADO COLLEGE
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RIDE THE TIDE TO SUCCESS

Rio Salado College Strategic Plan 2024-2026

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Message from the President

Founded as the "College Without Walls" in 1978, Rio Salado College (RSC) has been an innovator and leader in higher education for more than 45 years, serving the various needs of traditional and non-traditional students. Over the last several years, Rio Salado College, like many institutions, has faced a tidal wave of change. In 2019, Rio Salado was embarking upon a new era, with a new college mission, vision, and values launching right as the global pandemic began. The rapid social and technological changes spurred by COVID-19 and advancements in artificial intelligence make planning for tomorrow's challenges more critical than ever. Additionally, significant changes within the state of Arizona, including the adoption of bachelor's degrees at the community college level, have created new opportunities for the college that must be considered in our planning process. Five years later, Rio Salado College again finds itself at a time of challenge and change.

To help steer the college through the turbulent waters of this challenging time, I am excited to present Rio Salado's new strategic plan, Ride the Tide To Success. The plan results from countless hours of data review, discussion, and dialogue since 2023. It reflects both the changing landscape of higher education today and Rio Salado College's continuing commitment to student success. Building on the focus created in the previous plan, Rio Salado College maintains its commitment to student goal attainment while continuously working to improve our college and community for all our stakeholders. This includes furthering the institution's commitment to all students and acknowledging the challenges and opportunities found through continuous improvement in our programming and operational practices. Further, the Four Practices of Engagement– mindfulness, empathy, happiness, and resilience– continue to be a driving force behind the work of the college and align well with the Maricopa County Community College District's commitment to performance success training for all full-time employees.

The development of this plan was supplemented and supported by the work of the Maricopa County Community College District Office, which adopted a Strategic Planning Framework in collaboration with the Governing Board. The research and planning completed by the district have been incorporated into this plan to help align the college's strategies, goals, and priorities with those of the Maricopa County Community College District at large.

I sincerely thank our Strategic Alignment Committee, the leading body that develops and aligns our strategies and goals. Further, this plan would not be possible without the shared governance and leadership of Rio Salado College's Development Team and the President's Cabinet, which provided thoughtful leadership, collaboration, and insight in developing it.

As the higher education landscape and the world, in general, continue to evolve, Rio Salado College can draw strength from our purpose to "provide high-quality, flexible, and accessible education to empower individual goal attainment, foster partnerships, and strengthen communities." Together, we are confident that our continuing ability to empower learners everywhere through innovative education will drive our collective success.

Sincerely,

Kate Smith

Kate Smith, President
Rio Salado College

CULTURE

RIO SALADO COLLEGE
A MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

VISION

Empower learners everywhere through innovative education.

MISSION

We redefine the educational experience by anticipating the needs of our students and future workforce. We support learners where they are and provide high-quality, flexible, and accessible education to empower individual goal attainment, foster partnerships, and strengthen communities.

VALUES

Rio Salado College honors everyone's unique qualities and perspectives with respect and dignity.
We value you.

WE PLACE **YOU** AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO.

MINDFULNESS • EMPATHY • HAPPINESS • RESILIENCE

www.riosalado.edu/culture

Strategic Planning Context and Process

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, forcing changes across the face of every institution in America, including within the education sector. Founded as the "College Without Walls," Rio Salado was well positioned to provide distance learning when the pandemic hit; however, the rapid growth in distance and online learning across all educational institutions quickly changed the landscape of distance learning, and significantly impacted the size of the college's core student population. Though continued growth had been expected, increased competition within online education, including from other Maricopa colleges, hampered the progress of the previous strategic efforts.

Internally, three significant district-wide changes impacted the Rio Salado College planning process landscape. First, in 2020, the Arizona legislature passed legislation creating the opportunity for community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees, which Maricopa eagerly jumped into in 2021. Second, in the summer of 2022, the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) Governing Board adopted a District Strategic Framework, which eventually coalesced into a district-wide Strategic Plan. Third, a system-wide Strategic Enrollment Management Plan was launched as part of the district-wide Strategic Plan. The System Strategic Enrollment Management (SSEM) plan's initiatives to enhance the student journey, remove obstacles to success, and ensure students complete their programs align perfectly with Rio Salado College's 2024-2026 Strategic Plan.

Given the Governing Board's approval of a new District Strategic Framework, the inherent SSEM plan alignment, and the need to address bachelor's degree development and attainment, the college embraced the work of intentionally aligning Rio's Strategic Plan with the **MCCCD Strategic Plan**. Rather than completely changing direction, the process of institutional shared governance resulted in the decision to continue working on the strategic initiatives identified in the 2020-2024 plan with updates to better align with the District-level plan. Rio Salado College's 2024-2026 Strategic Plan reflects our decision to Ride the Tide left behind by a sea of change, as we double-down on our commitment to student success.

Timeline of Major Changes

2022

- Maricopa Community Colleges launches bachelor's initiative

2023

- New Strategic Framework and Plan adopted by District
- Rio launches first two bachelor's degrees

2024

- Rio works to align Strategic Plan and language with District
- Rio's first bachelor's degree graduates
- New strategies and goals approved by Rio's Shared Governance
- Next Strategic Plan launches

2025

Strategies and Goals

Rio's Strategic Alignment Committee worked on revising the previous 2020-2024 Strategic Goals and updating the terminology to align with the district-wide Strategic Plan. The three strategic goals from the 2020-2024 plan became four strategies in the revised 2024-2026 plan:

Strategic Goals 2020-2024	Strategies 2024-2026
Increase student goal attainment by 23% by 2024 with innovative and world-class experiences.	Increase student goal attainment with innovative solutions and engaging educational experiences.
Offer 23 new micro-credentials by 2024.	Offer innovative learning pathways to meet 21st-century community and workforce needs.
Foster a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.	Foster a culture of belonging for all students and all employees.
	Improve operational and organizational sustainability.

Rather than changing each goal entirely, the new strategies are seen as improved versions of work in a similar vein. College-wide goals have been articulated under each strategy. The goals represent the college's significant commitments and budgetary focus over the next two years. Considerations of fiscal capacity related to these commitments will be informed by the efforts of the Budget and Infrastructure Committee, enrollment trends, and regulatory changes. Further, each goal is measurable, providing a way to determine the success of each strategy undertaken by the college.

Strategy 1

With Strategy 1, there is a continued focus on student goal attainment through innovation. Of particular importance in this strategy is the ongoing monitoring and improvement of the year-over-year retention rates for credential-seeking students. Further, we embrace the idea that Rio Salado can appropriately differentiate student goals and associated outcomes and continue to serve those non-traditional students to the best of our ability.

STRATEGY 1: Increase student goal attainment with innovative solutions and engaging educational experiences.

a. Increase goal attainment for credit-bearing, non-credential-seeking students from 50.8% to 52% by June 30, 2026

b. Increase credential-seeking student 3-year completion rate from 24.5% to 30% by June 30, 2026

   i. Participate in the 3-year HLC Student Success Academy

   ii. Optimize early alerts and interventions across the college

   iii. Partner with Guild Career Opportunity Platform to improve outcomes for working adults

   iv. Implement a workforce structure that supports career connections and employment outcomes

   v. Experiment with hybrid modalities of instruction

Strategy 2

Strategy 2 broadens the scope of the previous Goal 2 by expanding efforts beyond micro-credentials to the larger innovative continuum of pathways requisite to meet community and workforce needs. This shift allows for the continued focus on short-term workforce programs while acknowledging the new bachelor's degree efforts already underway at Rio Salado College.

STRATEGY 2: Offer innovative learning pathways to meet 21st century community and workforce needs

a. Develop a college academic plan by June 30, 2026

b. Increase the enrollment of bachelor's degree students from 240 to 300 by June 30, 2026

c. Create two new alternative credentialing pathways by June 30, 2026

d. Launch Tempe Promise Program by June 30, 2026

e. Increase the number of low-cost/no-cost/OER course offerings by June 30, 2026

Strategy 3

In Strategy 3, Rio Salado College continues to embrace all of our students, staff, and community, adding focus to our previous Goal 3.

STRATEGY 3: Foster a culture of belonging for all students and all employees.

a. Implement a College-wide accessibility roadmap by June 30, 2026

b. Implement a College-wide Community and Engagement roadmap by June 30, 2026

c. Increase the number of programs for a greater sense of belonging for all students from 1 to at least 2 by June 30, 2026

Strategy 4

Strategy 4 ties Rio Salado College today to our storied past with a re-commitment to continuous quality improvement. A renewed focus on our operational and organizational sustainability will result in better outcomes and the college's long-term viability.

STRATEGY 4: Improve operational and organizational sustainability.

a. Implement an Artificial Intelligence (AI) roadmap by June 30, 2026

b. Develop a prototype for the next generation of RioLearn platform by June 30, 2026

c. Launch an integrated planning cycle by June 30, 2026

Rio's focus on increasing completion rates, creating new learning pathways, and fostering an inclusive environment connects with the broader System Strategic Enrollment Management goals. By helping even more learners earn valuable credentials, developing new credentialing options, and expanding student support, we demonstrate our dedication to empowering all students. Additionally, our commitment to innovative solutions and next-generation learning technologies ensures a seamless and supportive educational experience, driving successful outcomes for all of our students.

Implementation, Monitoring, and Reporting Fall 2024 - Summer 2026

The college introduced the Four Disciplines of Execution (4DX) Framework at the start of the previous Strategic Plan to help focus on the three identified strategic goals, and continues to use this operational approach today. The 4DX framework allows for a cascading of priorities across teams and departments throughout the college. Each department is able to identify one specific goal and approach to help the college achieve one of its four key strategies.

4DX progress continues to be monitored through departmental scoreboards. Leveraging 4DX to create new team-level goals annually helps the college stay nimble and responsive to changes in higher education and keeps a focus on continuous improvement.

The implementation of 4DX is supported through an annual planning day, where all teams work on reviewing the previous year's commitment and making a new one as part of the department review cycle. In the department review cycle, each department completes a reflective look at its programs and services to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas of opportunity.

While the 4DX efforts help create a direct connection between all employees and our Strategic Plan, it is only one way the strategies and goals are implemented and operationalized as a college. Specialized work groups, committees, and taskforces, established through Rio Salado's shared governance process, are the main facilitators behind the articulated goals.

The execution of the college's strategic goals will be tracked, monitored, and evaluated within Rio's data and reporting resources and published regularly through annual progress reports, reflecting the institution's commitment to continuous improvement via the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle.

Conclusion

This plan reflects a shared vision to steer Rio Salado College toward a future of innovation, excellence, and sustainability. Through the diligent efforts of our faculty, staff, and stakeholders, we have established ambitious yet achievable goals that reaffirm our commitments to academic quality, student success, and community engagement.

Our strategic plan is more than a document; it is the blueprint that unites us in our college vision to empower learners everywhere through innovative education. We remain steadfast in our commitment to transparency, accountability, and improvement, and by upholding these principles we will not only meet the goals outlined in our strategic plan, but also exceed expectations.

The dedication and collaboration of our entire college are essential to realizing the transformative impact articulated in this plan. Together, we aspire to build a brighter future for Rio Salado College, one that empowers our students, strengthens our community, and contributes to the broader educational landscape. We engage all members of our community on this journey, as we work collectively to turn our vision into reality and ride the tide to success.

Key Contributors to the Strategic Plan Development

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