



OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY TRAJECTORY CHANGE INITIATIVE (TCI) PLAN/UPDATE

Executive Summary

The **Trajectory Change Initiative (TCI)** is Tennessee State University's comprehensive plan to address its most pressing challenges, restore operational stability, and position the institution for long-term sustainability and growth. Rooted in the principles of **Restore, Realign, and Reignite**, the TCI serves as the plan to save TSU and sustain it as a future-ready institution.

This document outlines the challenges that brought TSU to this critical juncture, the phased approach of the TCI, and the progress made to date, while also detailing the next steps in Phase II of the initiative.

TSU Matters

Tennessee State University has evolved into a multifaceted social impact institution. As Tennessee's only public HBCU, TSU is uniquely positioned to transform lives and strengthen communities across the state and beyond.

Its roles include:

- **HBCU:** Advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- **Land Grant Institution:** Driving agricultural innovation and community development.
- **R2 Research University:** Contributing to groundbreaking research and academic excellence.
- **Regional Comprehensive University:** Providing accessible, high-quality education to serve the state's needs.

TSU matters because it serves as a gateway to opportunity for first-generation and underserved students. It drives economic growth, fosters innovation, and empowers future leaders across industries.

The TCI reflects TSU's commitment to "**Doing More to Be More**," ensuring that TSU not only addresses current challenges but also sustains a **future-ready** institution that continues to make an impact for generations to come.



Our Challenges: How We Got Here

Tennessee State University, the state’s only public historically black land-grant institution, has faced significant challenges over the years due to chronic underfunding, enrollment over-commitments, and alleged financial and operational deficiencies. These issues threaten not only the institution’s credibility but also its mission to transform lives, prepare leaders, and contribute to community and economic development.

An external review in 2019 highlighted areas needing improvement, such as staffing alignment and operational controls, while more recent audits from the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury and Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation emphasized the urgency for reform.

Upon his appointment as Interim President in July 2024, Dr. Ronald A. Johnson initiated a rapid risk assessment that not only confirmed the findings of the previous audits but also revealed long-standing structural deficits that pose an existential threat to TSU’s future.

Key challenges identified include:

- **Financial Challenges:** \$46 million projected deficit, \$14 million in stale accounts payable, and insufficient reserves of \$8.4 million—well below the required threshold.
- **Enrollment Decline:** A 23% overall enrollment drop, including a 50% decrease in first-time freshman enrollment.
- **Systemic Issues:** Inefficient processes in financial aid, advising, and enrollment systems, compounded by the lingering effects of the FAFSA rollout.
- **Structural Misalignment:** Insufficient alignment of TSU’s operations with its mission as an HBCU, Land Grant Institution, R2 Research University, and Regional Comprehensive University.
- **Underfunding:** Decades of inequitable funding, leaving TSU under-resourced compared to peer institutions.



Our Solution

To address these critical challenges, Dr. Johnson launched the **Trajectory Change Initiative (TCI)** as part of his First 100-Days Action Plan. The TCI is a comprehensive strategy driven by three imperatives: **Restore, Realign, and Reignite**. It serves as a roadmap to stabilize the university, rebuild trust, and ensure long-term sustainability.

The TCI is structured in two distinct phases:

- **Phase I:** Focused on immediate stabilization, addressing urgent challenges such as financial deficits, operational inefficiencies, and day-to-day operations. This phase laid the groundwork for restoring trust, improving transparency, and rebuilding institutional resilience.
- **Phase II:** Aims to drive long-term transformation by addressing structural deficits, launching a comprehensive enrollment and student success strategy, implementing financial modeling to right-size the institution, and optimizing resources to ensure operational and financial sustainability.

This dual-phased approach represents TSU's commitment to "Doing More to Be More" and sustaining a future-ready institution that continues to serve as a pillar of opportunity, equity, and innovation in Tennessee and beyond.



TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
TRAJECTORY CHANGE INITIATIVE (TCI) PLAN/UPDATE

The TCI: Phase I – Immediate Stabilization

Overview

Phase I focused on addressing TSU’s most urgent challenges: stabilizing financial operations, improving transparency, and laying the groundwork for long-term transformation. This phase included implementing the Financial Action Plan to reduce costs and realign resources while fostering stakeholder trust and engagement.

Key Components

1. **Financial Action Plan:** Addressed the \$46 million deficit through cost-saving measures and strategic financial management.
2. **Enrollment and Student Success Plan:** Began revamping enrollment processes and developing strategies to rebuild pipelines.
3. **Operational Realignment:** Streamlined operations to align with TSU’s mission and priorities.
4. **Transparency and Stakeholder Engagement:** Strengthened trust through frequent communication and engagement.
5. **Alumni Engagement Plan:** Strengthened alumni relationships to drive advocacy and financial support.



OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY TRAJECTORY CHANGE INITIATIVE (TCI) PLAN/UPDATE

The TCI: Phase I – Immediate Stabilization

PROGRESS UPDATES

Component	Description	Progress	Status
Financial Action Plan	Achieved \$13 million in annualized savings; recovered \$3.2 million in receivables.	Secured \$43 million in emergency funding.	Completed
Enrollment and Student Success Plan	Revamping financial aid processes and advising systems; planning targeted recruitment efforts.	Future Tiger Walk attracted 200+ students.	In Progress
Operational Realignment	Initiated academic and operational restructuring; implemented hiring freeze.	Streamlining underway.	In Progress
Transparency and Stakeholder Engagement	Delivered public presentations, video addresses, and launched the "Close the Gap" campaign.	Raised \$500,000+ for student debt relief.	Completed
Alumni Engagement Plan	Increased alumni participation in events and fundraising initiatives.	Strengthened alumni relations.	In Progress



TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
TRAJECTORY CHANGE INITIATIVE (TCI) PLAN/UPDATE

The TCI: Phase II – Strategic Transformation

Overview

Phase II focuses on addressing long-term structural deficits, stabilizing enrollment, optimizing resources, and realigning academic programs to position TSU for sustainable growth. This phase builds upon the successes of Phase I to ensure continued progress toward a future-ready TSU.

Key Components

1. **Deficit Reduction:** Continue strategic financial management and cost-saving measures to eliminate the \$46 million deficit.
2. **Enrollment Stabilization:** Finalize and implement the Enrollment and Student Success Plan to rebuild and sustain student enrollment.
3. **Right-Sizing the Institution:** Align academic programs and administrative functions with TSU's mission.
4. **Optimizing Resources:** Maximize the value of TSU's assets and partnerships to enhance efficiency and revenue generation.
5. **Alumni and Community Engagement:** Deepen relationships with stakeholders to support long-term goals.



OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY TRAJECTORY CHANGE INITIATIVE (TCI) PLAN/UPDATE

The TCI: Phase II – Strategic Transformation

PROGRESS UPDATES

Component	Description	Progress	Status
Deficit Reduction	Developing a financial model to guide efforts.	Strategic measures ongoing.	In Progress
Enrollment Stabilization	Finalizing and launching a comprehensive plan by December 16, 2024.	Recruitment and retention initiatives ongoing.	In Progress
Right Sizing the Institution	Planning academic restructuring to streamline operations.	Preliminary assessments underway.	In Progress
Optimizing Resources	Evaluating opportunities for new revenue streams through asset utilization.	Initial evaluations completed.	Ongoing
Alumni and Community Engagement	Expanding communication channels and events to involve alumni and community members.	Enhanced collaboration in progress.	Ongoing



OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY TRAJECTORY CHANGE INITIATIVE (TCI) PLAN/UPDATE

Conclusion

As we continue our journey through the Trajectory Change Initiative, we remain steadfast in our belief that Tennessee State University's best days lie ahead. The challenges we face are significant, but they are not insurmountable. Together—with the unwavering support of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and stakeholders—we are charting a course toward a stronger, more sustainable future.

TSU has always been a gateway to opportunity, a hub of innovation, and a beacon of hope. Through the principles of Restore, Realign, and Reignite, we are building a future-ready institution that not only overcomes its current challenges but thrives as a vital force for change in Tennessee and beyond.

We move forward with resolve, inspired by the resilience of our community and the knowledge that TSU matters. It matters because of the lives it changes, the communities it uplifts, and the leaders it prepares. Together, we will sustain a TSU that continues to lead, inspire, and transform for generations to come.

Because when TSU thrives, so do the countless lives it touches.



OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
TRAJECTORY CHANGE INITIATIVE (TCI) PLAN/UPDATE

Appendices

1. Detailed Financial Action Plan
2. Enrollment and Student Success Plan Draft
3. State and Stakeholder Engagement Framework
4. Resource Optimization Assessment