

**CONESTOGA**  
Connect Life and Learning

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2024



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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND BOARD OF GOVERNORS CHAIR

Conestoga's 2021-2024 Strategic Plan was developed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the greatest social and economic challenge we have faced in the history of the Ontario college system. We appreciate the outstanding efforts of Conestoga employees, partners and friends to support the college and our students through this difficult time.

While the pandemic has brought about many changes in the way that we deliver programming and services, we have never lost sight of the responsibilities we have to our learners and employees and the communities we serve.

As more Canadians become vaccinated and we look forward to the easing of pandemic restrictions, it is clear that Conestoga will have a significant role to play in rebuilding Ontario's economy through education and applied research that will address workforce needs, support business recovery, and provide opportunities for displaced workers to return to meaningful employment.

Conestoga's 2021-2024 Strategic Plan provides a framework for the journey ahead. We will continue to focus on building capacity,

advancing quality and enhancing sustainability as we work in collaboration with our partners to support learner success, economic development and growth, and the prosperity and well-being of the communities we serve.

This ambitious plan includes new campus development as well as the expansion and enhancement of existing facilities to serve more students from our region and around the world as they prepare for successful futures. It addresses emerging talent shortages that impede business growth, and supports the development of new capacity to address identified needs.

There are many exciting developments ahead. We invite you to engage with us as we continue to build towards our shared vision for leadership in applied learning and research that enables students to succeed and addresses workforce demands.

Thanks to the many individuals who have contributed to the development of the 2021-2024 Strategic Plan. Your input and commitment to the process are greatly appreciated.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Boutzis'.

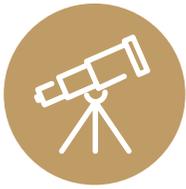
**Frank Boutzis,**  
Chair, Board of Governors



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Tibbits'.

**John Tibbits**  
President

# STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW



## Our Vision

A recognized leader in applied learning and research that enables student success in meeting workforce demands



## Our Mission

To promote the prosperity and well-being of the communities we serve through the delivery of programming, workforce development and industry-focused research that meets local, regional, and international demands



## Our Values

- **Student Focus**
- **Collaboration**
- **Accountability**
- **Inclusiveness**
- **Innovation**

## Strategic Goals

### Quality

Demonstrate excellence in programming and services while providing an outstanding learning and working environment for students and employees

- Continuous Improvement
- Digital Transformation
- Alumni Connections
- High Performing Employees
- Health and Wellness
- Inclusive Services
- Community Engagement

### Capacity

Continue campus growth with enhanced access to programming for diverse learners and increased enrolment to meet the workforce needs of the communities we serve

- Campus expansion
- Facility renewal
- Domestic enrolment
- International enrolment
- Market-driven programs
- Applied research
- Technology infrastructure

### Sustainability

Develop and enhance stakeholder relationships and partnerships and support employers in responding to changing social and economic conditions while optimizing organizational performance and supporting environmental sustainability

- Responsible resource management
- Environmental solutions
- Brand enhancement and differentiation
- Business, community and government partnerships
- Employer engagement
- Economic recovery and development

# SETTING THE CONTEXT



Like most individuals, businesses, institutions, and communities across Ontario, Conestoga and the members of our college community have been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the many challenges faced in 2020 and 2021, we have continued to achieve many successes, including strong financial results, a significant digital transformation to support remote learning, and excellent outcomes in our efforts to protect the health and safety of our employees and students.

As we look forward to dealing with the long-term consequences of the pandemic, we continue to face a somewhat uncertain future. The date of full reopening remains dependent on external factors such as vaccination rates and the transmissibility of new COVID-19 variants. There will be an increased need for re-skilling displaced workers as businesses realign to post-pandemic realities and as many low- and mid-skilled jobs disappear as the result of the accelerated adoption of automation. The

pandemic has also highlighted the urgent need for additional front-line workers to serve Ontario's health-care needs.

Conestoga is well-positioned to contribute solutions to these challenges thanks to our strong ties to employers, our high-quality programming, and our growing capacity. The following strategic plan outlines how we plan to address these challenges and emerge stronger than ever in the post-COVID-19 period.

## About Conestoga

Conestoga's growing network of campuses serves approximately 55,000 full and part-time learners each year. In 2020-21, the college's diverse student body included more than 8,000 international students from over 80 different countries. These learners have been drawn to Conestoga to pursue a high-quality education that will help them prepare for career and life success.

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# 87%

## Conestoga graduates obtained employment within 6 months of graduation

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Committed to continuous improvement and positive student outcomes, Conestoga is a provincial leader in overall student retention. The 2019-2020 graduation rate of 72.4 per cent is among the very best for all Ontario's public colleges, comparing very favourably with the provincial average of 66 per cent.

Not only are students graduating at a higher rate, but they are also putting their credentials to good use. According to the most recent provincial key performance indicator data, nearly 87 per cent of Conestoga graduates obtained employment within 6 months of graduation, compared to the provincial average of 85.5. More than 87 per cent of Conestoga students indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied that their program was providing skills and knowledge that would help them achieve their career goals. The same level of satisfaction was indicated by students across the provincial college system.

Almost 93 per cent of employers confirmed they were satisfied with the skills and knowledge of new employees that Conestoga trained, slightly higher than the provincial average of 91 per cent. Importantly, these strong outcomes represent the full spectrum of program offerings across Conestoga's growing network of campuses. In the community, our graduates own more than 5,000 local business and more than 50 per

cent of local adults have participated in Conestoga education and training activities. Our alumni network is over 150,000 strong.

From a research perspective, Conestoga is ranked among Canada's top 20 research colleges and holds the country's highest ranking for Industry Research Intensity. Our research funding portfolio of more than \$37 million includes more than \$2 million in new funding awarded in 2020-2021. Over the last year, more than 220 faculty and 4,200 students were engaged in applied research activities, including curriculum, capstone and independent applied research projects.

Conestoga's strengths in delivering effective education, training, and applied research solutions will help accelerate the post-pandemic recovery of our region, its people, and the province more generally.

### Looking Ahead

For 2021-2024, Conestoga will build on a long history of success as we continue to focus on enhancing the quality of programs and services, expanding capacity to address the growing and diverse needs of the learners and communities we serve, and creating a strong and sustainable future. While the pace of change continues to accelerate, exacerbated by the many changes required to adapt to changing conditions through the global COVID-19 pandemic, our direction for the next three years is consistent with our previous commitments as outlined in the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan as well as our Strategic Mandate Agreement with the Province of Ontario.

We will do this through several important pillars that include ensuring financial sustainability, continuing with expansion plans, supporting international students, optimizing human resource strategies, pursuing a more sustainable college, and thereby growing our competitive advantage.

The pandemic temporarily reduced college revenues while increasing costs related to staffing, health and safety, and technology as Conestoga made important investments in a fully digital infrastructure to maintain high quality education opportunities delivered remotely. As we move forward, additional investments will be required to build and maintain digital capacity. Conestoga will ensure a bright financial future through continued enrolment growth, responsible management of revenues and expenses, enhancement of revenue-generating opportunities, and exploration of potential governmental and non-governmental funding supports.



In terms of expansion, we will continue to focus on growth and expanding our footprint across southwestern Ontario to support the needs of individuals, businesses, and communities as we evolve as a provincial leader in polytechnic education focused on applied learning and applied research.

Within the next 10-15 years, our goal is to host 7-8 major campuses across southwestern Ontario, including Cambridge (Reuter), Cambridge (Fountain Street), Doon, Downtown Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph, Brantford and Milton, with at least 4,000 full-time post-secondary students on each campus. These

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## Studies have shown that proximity to a campus is a key factor in a student's decision to attend post-secondary or enter the workforce

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larger campuses will increase the college's capacity to support the workforce needs of the communities we serve while also providing cost efficiencies that will support investment in a more comprehensive range of quality services and academic supports for students.

We will complete the development of Ontario's largest skilled trades campus on-time and on-budget, with a scheduled opening in Fall 2022.

In addition, we will continue to develop satellite hubs across the province, including in remote and rural communities, to address local needs and provide access to programming in high-demand areas such as health care and English-language testing.

Numerous studies have shown that proximity to a campus is a key factor in a student's decision to attend post-secondary or enter the workforce, with an 80-kilometer radius being the farthest a student will travel on a regular basis to attend school. This is especially true for middle- and lower-income families who may struggle with the financial implications of sending a student away to school, as well as for older students, who may balance learning with pressing family or work responsibilities. These demographics are strongly represented in Conestoga's student population.

While some of these distance, financial or lifestyle barriers can be overcome with online programming, it is clear that many students need hands-on training and in-person instruction in addition to online courses.

Therefore, it is imperative that Conestoga continue to develop its network of full-service campuses as well as local training hubs as we strive to meet workforce needs. Added to these efforts will be the continued development of remote and hybrid learning opportunities that will provide flexible learning options for students seeking alternatives to in-person programming.

International students will continue to play an important role in Conestoga's growth. We have seen clear indications that the demand from international students for Conestoga programming will continue to remain high, and even exceed pre-pandemic levels thanks in part to ambitious immigration targets set by the federal government. The college will continue efforts to attract, retain, and serve international students from countries around the world in support of Canada's immigration strategy.

Retaining an outstanding employee team who can deliver excellence in programs and services is a key component in Conestoga's future growth and success, and will help ensure the college remains a leading educational destination for local and international students alike. We are committed to creating an inclusive, welcoming, and healthy campus environment that meets the needs of both learners and employees, and will work towards determining

the optimum balance of in-person and remote programming moving forward. Ultimately, this means establishing measures and targets for service delivery to ensure that students and employees are getting the high-quality experience they expect and deserve.

Conestoga is also committed to supporting Canada's clean growth and climate change goals. All aspects of managing current facilities and planning new infrastructure will continue to be approached through a sustainability lens as we work towards improving energy efficiency, reducing GHG emissions, and implementing waste reduction strategies. Environmental considerations are included in a growing number of Conestoga programs as we prepare a new generation of workers to support the sustainability goals of Ontario's businesses.

Ultimately, each of these pillars helps us create a competitive advantage that differentiates Conestoga from other post-secondary institutions. We will continue to build on this distinct advantage through our ongoing efforts to prioritize student and employee engagement, deliver technology-enriched programs and services, foster an inclusive and welcoming global campus, prioritize student needs, and continue to ensure graduates are well-prepared to meet employer needs and launch successful careers.



# SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S RECOVERY AND BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Canada's birth rate is declining, and the population is aging. A growing skills gap has emerged as many older workers retire without qualified replacements to assume their roles. In the construction industry alone, for example, recent studies project a national shortage of 82,000 skilled workers by 2029.<sup>1</sup>

Meeting Canada's future workforce needs will require a significant infusion of skilled workers, many of them new Canadians. The federal government's immigration strategy recognizes the important role that newcomers and international students will play in our future growth and prosperity.

Conestoga is committed to playing a significant role in building the labour force of the future by expanding the college's footprint across southwestern Ontario and enhancing our capacity to meet the needs for skilled workers to address business and community needs. In addition to expanding our physical campuses, we will continue to develop remote and hybrid delivery models that increase access to programming for diverse learner groups. We will continue to expand our program offerings, including micro-credentials, in alignment with evolving needs.

Conestoga continues to advocate for increased flexibility in the credentials Ontario's public colleges can offer in order to meet the full spectrum of workforce needs. The delivery of three-year degrees and Master's degrees in applied areas of study at Ontario colleges would attract a larger body of applicants to our institutions, support increased specialization in programming, and provide a larger, more

diversified talent supply to serve the needs of our province's growing communities.

Only 25 per cent of Conestoga's operating revenue in 2019-20 came from grant funding, including provincial operating grants. Tuition for domestic students has been frozen for two years and will remain at its current level until at least the fall of 2022. In order to maintain the high-quality learning experience students expect and deserve, the college must continue to focus on both domestic and international enrolment growth targeted to the jobs of the future.

Campus expansion projects in Brantford and Milton will help drive growth in domestic enrolment via an expanded catchment area as well as provide opportunities to increase international student enrolment in these areas.

In addition to supporting domestic students in their efforts to achieve their potential and launch successful futures, it is also imperative that Conestoga continue to expand international enrolment to meet the need for highly skilled and educated workers in Ontario. These students are a primary source of immigration, with many choosing to settle in Canada once their studies are complete.

Over the next 25 years, Ontario's population is projected to increase by 31.5 per cent, with immigration expected to account for 83 per cent of growth.<sup>2</sup> Based on current patterns, a significant proportion of Ontario's newcomers will settle in or near Waterloo Wellington and other areas served by Conestoga campuses.

1. Varga, Christine, "Construction industry fears a skilled-trades shortage", Globe and Mail, February 23, 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/industry-news/property-report/article-construction-industry-fears-a-skilled-trades-shortage/>

2. Ontario Population Projections Update, 2019–2046, <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/projections/#s2>

Ontario's increased population will come with a plethora of increased demands – more homes, more services, more health care, more transportation options, and more businesses of all kinds to produce the full range of goods and services required to meet the needs of growing communities. Supporting this population will require an exponential growth in businesses and services, along with a highly skilled workforce to meet new demands. Investing in campus expansion and new developments will provide Conestoga with the additional capacity required to meet the workforce needs of growing communities and provide more individuals with opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge to launch successful futures.

### **The Changing World of Work**

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as an accelerating force for many existing trends, including the adoption of technology and the move towards automated processes. This will continue to have a profound impact on the nature of work in Ontario, with some analysts indicating that a quarter of current work activities will be displaced by automation between 2016 and 2030.<sup>3</sup> This will result in fewer opportunities for lower skilled and mid-skilled workers, creating an increased demand for upskilling and retraining as employer needs and expectations evolve at a rapid pace. At the same time, skill shortages will continue to grow, both as the result of an aging workforce in areas such as the trades as well as unprecedented demands for skilled workers in health care and community services, information and communications technology, and other STEM-related fields.

Conestoga and Ontario's other public colleges have a key role to play in supporting the

resiliency and adaptation of the workforce through a wide range of programming developed in close collaboration with employers. These programs range from traditional degrees and diplomas to micro-credentials and corporate training initiatives that allow workers to upskill quickly, either to adapt to new demands with current employers or to return to the labour force in new, more resilient roles. Our close collaboration with employers is instrumental in our efforts to ensure programming is regularly updated, relevant to the labour force, and responds to the needs of both employers and their future employees.

### **Meeting Learner Needs**

For Conestoga to maintain its position as a top choice for both domestic and international students, as well as for the employers who hire our graduates, the college must remain at the forefront of programming options and technology. Providing both flexible delivery options and local access to programming and services will be essential to student recruitment and retention. We will continue to work in close collaboration with our industry partners to adapt programming to meet evolving needs and deliver world-class curriculum infused with technology to prepare graduates for success.

Conestoga has long been committed to an access and equity agenda, providing opportunities for learners from all backgrounds and circumstances to achieve their potential. Foundational programs and established educational pathways provide opportunities for learners to start where they are and progress as far as their interest and ability will take them, with a comprehensive suite of support services available to enable success.

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3. Manyika, James, "Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained: Workforce Transitions in a Time of Automation", McKinsey Global Institute, December 2017, <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20and%20Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/W hat%20the%20future%20of%20work%20will%20mean%20for%20jobs%20skills%20and%20wages/MGI-Jobs-Lost-Jobs-Gained-Executive-summary-December-6-2017.pdf>



## Moving Forward

The college has a key role to play in Ontario's recovery, supporting industry and community needs as we provide opportunities for learners from all backgrounds and circumstances to develop in-demand skills and launch successful futures.

Supporting those workers displaced as a result of the pandemic in their efforts to develop the skills and knowledge they need to return to the workforce will contribute to the development of the talent pipeline required to meet evolving workforce needs. Applied research in collaboration with industry will develop new solutions to current and emerging challenges. Our efforts will not only support the learners we serve but will also contribute to the success of businesses and the prosperity and well-being of communities across the province.

This role is not new for Conestoga, but the level of economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic across all walks of life is. Colleges such as Conestoga will play an instrumental role in Ontario's recovery through education, training, and applied research that will help struggling businesses adjust to new realities and provide opportunities for displaced workers of all backgrounds in their efforts to return to meaningful employment.

# VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

To respond to the needs of our communities, Conestoga must put forward measurable goals and objectives that will address current challenges and help college, community, and the individuals we serve to emerge stronger. The strategic Vision, Mission, and Values outlined below will guide our work in the years ahead. A corresponding set of strategic goals and objectives outline the specific actions that we will pursue in support of our ambitious vision.



## Our Vision

A **recognized leader in applied learning and research** that **enables student success** in meeting **workforce demands**



## Our Mission

To promote the **prosperity and well-being of the communities** we serve through the delivery of **programming, workforce development, and industry-focused research** that meets **local, regional, and international demands**



## Our Values



### Student Focus

We create the environments for students to realize their potential and graduate as individuals who can make meaningful contributions to their communities.



### Collaboration

We work with government, industry, community, and international partners to reach our strategic goals and create a vibrant learning and working environment built on excellence, quality, and respectful interactions.



### Accountability

We fulfill our commitments to the organization and the broader college community by assuming responsibility for our individual conduct, action, and results.



### Inclusiveness

We promote and foster a college community that is characterized and enriched by equity, diversity, and inclusivity.



### Innovation

We constantly strive to improve, enhance, and rethink the programs and services we provide to achieve ongoing improvement and higher standards of performance.

# STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



## Quality

*Demonstrate excellence in programming and services while providing an outstanding learning and working environment for students and employees*

Preparing learners for successful careers and futures requires unwavering attention to the quality of the overall educational experience. Programs must continue to evolve to meet the changing needs and expectations of the workforce, while a full range of accessible services must be readily available to support students during their studies and through their transition to meaningful employment.

Conestoga's longstanding commitment to quality can be seen in the success of our students and graduates.

Our graduate employment and satisfaction rates are consistently well above the provincial average. Almost 87 per cent of graduates were employed within six months of graduation in 2019-2020 and close to 82 per cent of graduates indicated that their college experience was useful in achieving their goals. Approximately 93 per cent of employers indicated their satisfaction with newly hired Conestoga graduates.

Conestoga's graduation rate of more than 72 per cent is among the highest in the province.

The provincial College Quality Assurance Audit Process (CQAAP) conducted in 2020 concluded that Conestoga meets or exceeds all provincial quality assurance standards required for Ontario's public colleges, placing the college at the Mature level of the OCQAS scale, the highest possible ranking.

## Objectives

- Continue to **improve the quality of programs and support services** through ongoing monitoring, review, and the application of quality assurance measures and processes.
- Continue to accelerate and **leverage digital technology** to enrich curriculum as well as increase availability of, and access to, programs, while differentiating Conestoga and its program offerings and enhancing program flexibility and customization to meet learner needs.
- **Foster and sustain alumni relationships** to provide employment opportunities for students and graduates while enhancing and reinforcing the Conestoga brand and reputation.
- **Foster and support the development of a high-performing employee team** that has adequate resources and is provided with ongoing training and development opportunities.
- **Continue to focus on the health and wellness of students and employees** to cultivate a supportive teaching, learning, and working environment.
- **Provide a full range of high-quality and inclusive services to students**, considering their diverse backgrounds, that contribute to their academic, personal and professional success.
- **Identify and promote opportunities for engagement** among members of the college community to enhance both student and organizational success.



## Capacity

*Continue campus growth with enhanced access to programming for diverse learners and increased enrolment to meet the workforce needs of the communities we serve*

Conestoga is committed to the delivery of a comprehensive range of education and training options to provide learners from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge to gain meaningful employment and contribute to their communities.

We continue to make substantial progress in the expansion of campus facilities and the development of new programs targeted to meet evolving workforce needs.

In 2020-2021, 20 new programs were approved internally and received Board of Governors approval. The ministry approved 35 programs over the year and 13 micro-credentials were launched. These rapid training programs help people upgrade their skills to find new employment.

Conestoga delivers more degree programs than any Ontario college outside of the GTA including the province's only college-based engineering degrees fully accredited by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board. The college has also emerged as a clear leader in the delivery of education and training programs to support the seniors care sector.

New strengths in online learning and a range of campus expansion and development projects will be instrumental in supporting Conestoga's efforts to prepare more learners to meet local, regional and provincial workforce needs.

### Objectives

- **Plan and prioritize campus expansion** in support of Conestoga's overall growth to meet employer and workforce needs.
- **Renew and enhance existing facilities** to support growth and improve the quality of the student and employee experience while improving space and resource utilization.
- **Continue to focus on increased domestic enrolment** across all categories of programming through ongoing promotion and recruitment as well as the delivery of a broad and diverse range of courses, programs, and credentials that can be customized to meet market demand.
- **Promote, grow and diversify international enrolment** through increased focus and emphasis on support services and integration within the college and broader community in order to contribute to Canada's immigration goals and address current and emerging workforce needs.
- **Expand market-driven programs and applied research** in response to ever-changing social, economic, and market demand on employers, businesses, and industries.
- **Develop in-demand graduates** by expanding and leveraging programming in work-integrated, experiential, and active learning that responds to current and evolving workforce needs with a particular focus on skills development, entrepreneurship, and leadership in the green economy.
- **Plan and enhance the technology infrastructure, systems, processes and tools** to support a growing network of campuses while enhancing the delivery of programs and services.



## Sustainability

*Develop and enhance stakeholder relationships and partnerships and support employers in responding to changing social and economic conditions while optimizing organizational performance and supporting environmental sustainability*

For Conestoga, strategic growth, collaborative partnerships, community engagement and responsible resource management provide a strong foundation for the achievement of our ambitious vision.

During 2020-2021, the college adopted a flexible, coordinated and responsive approach to managing operations through the unique challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts have been instrumental in protecting the health, safety and well-being of the Conestoga community while positioning our college for future success.

By reducing costs where possible and focusing our efforts on optimizing student access and support, Conestoga succeeded in meeting and exceeding performance expectations in 2020-2021. Despite lower revenues from tuition and student fees as the result of lower enrolment, the college ended the year with a financial surplus that will support our efforts to contribute to Ontario's post-pandemic recovery.

As pandemic restrictions ease, there are clear indications that demand for Conestoga programs will continue to increase. More than 11,500 full-time students are enrolled in Spring 2021, a 44 per cent year-over-year increase, and up more than 56 per cent from Spring 2019. Corporate training and workforce development initiatives provide additional capacity to address workforce skills gaps, particularly in the health care and manufacturing sectors.

Building on past success, we will continue to focus on responsible management of college resources, enhanced partnerships and additional revenue generation as we work towards the realization of our ambitious vision.

### Objectives

- **Plan and manage financial and operating resources** to support the sustainable delivery of Conestoga's programs and services and enable the continued expansion of programming and services.
- **Contribute to Canada's fight against climate change** through the development of innovative environmental solutions for industry as well as continued efforts to improve energy efficiency, reduce GHG emissions, and implement waste reduction and diversion strategies across college operations.
- **Develop and implement marketing strategies and plans** that differentiate the college, reflect the brand, and drive overall growth.
- **Engage proactively with employers, business, community and government partners** to address evolving expectations and priorities, respond to changing workforce and community needs, and increase understanding of Conestoga's role and importance in the prosperity and well-being of regions across southwestern Ontario and beyond.
- **Work with and support employers** in understanding and responding to changing social, economic, and market trends and demands with a particular focus on the skilled trades and the opportunities afforded by the green economy.
- **Position Conestoga as a vital component in the social and economic recovery** and future development of the municipalities and regions we serve.

# MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

Conestoga is dedicated to delivering programs and services that meet the expectations and requirements of all our stakeholders. To ensure that the college continues to do this, we will be planning and monitoring our performance using the measurement categories outlined in the following diagram.

Each of the measurement categories is aligned with one of the three strategic goals. For each

measurement category, the measures and the performance targets will be included as part of the annual operational planning. Regular progress reports will be provided to the Board and other key stakeholders.

This combination of measures, targets, and regular reporting is how the college will measure its success.

## Measuring Our Success





**CONESTOGA**

Connect Life and Learning

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