

## ***Storytelling: Blue Ridge University – Jolene Crowder, President Development and Use of the Engagement Action Plan***

***Storytelling: Blue Ridge University Uses Engagement Action Plans on its Journey.*** This episode in the ongoing story of Blue Ridge University describes the first version of the Engagement Action Plan that the University used on its ten-year transformation campaign from 2020-2030. It tells how the President engaged the Guiding Coalition in crafting a five-page Action Plan, which it uses as a guide to build understanding, commitment, and action, while refining continuously.

***Why Read This?*** The story provides for the reader a completed, five-page version of Blue Ridge’s Action Roadmap and a description of how it was used and refined over the journey.

### ***The Story*** *(Referenced in Chapter IV)*

The Engagement Action Plan is essential to our efforts to lead, navigate and orchestrate our ten-year campaign for transformation at Blue Ridge University. It provides the Blue Ridge community access to a regularly updated comprehensive report of progress toward the University vision for 2030, key performance goals, and execution and evolution of initiatives for their achievement. The Plan is updated quarterly and more often if needed.

It helps orchestrate the work of the strategy coalitions, providing all of them an overarching view of progress on each initiative. This is important because the strategies are interdependent.

The timeframe of the Engagement Action Plan reported below departs from the usual monthly report and reviews the first five years of impressive progress in the Blue Ridge ten-year campaign for transformation and regeneration.

Jolene Crowder  
President  
Blue Ridge University



**BLUE RIDGE UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN**

August 14, 2026  
 Next report:  
 September 15,  
 2026

**Vision: A University Dedicated to Meeting the Lifelong Educational Needs of the Learners It Serves.**

*At Blue Ridge University, our sole focus is on the educational needs of the learners and communities we serve. We seek a lifelong relationship with these learners, curating the educational experiences they need to be vital participants in and citizens of society throughout their lives. We also seek to improve in significant ways the economic development and quality of life in the communities we serve.*

**Process Status Overview**

*We are now five years into our ten-year campaign to transform Blue Ridge into an institution dedicated to meeting the lifelong needs of its learners. In this time, we have surmounted the challenges of the 2020-21 COVID-19 Pandemic and are showing genuine momentum toward University-wide transformation.*

*Clear indicators of this success are reported for each strategy below. Plans for each strategy for next year, which include some corrections in course, are also summarized there. In addition, we have added a fifth strategy: **To reinvent General Education and Critical Thinking for All Undergraduate Students**. This information comes from the five-year progress review recently completed by the Guiding Coalition.*

**Open Invitation to the Blue Ridge Community**

*The President and members of the Guiding Coalition continue to invite all members of the University community, if they have not already done so, to join in the work of this effort to transform Blue Ridge University. Over 250 of your colleagues have found fulfillment in their participation. This participation enables you to make a positive difference for the learners we seek to serve for a lifetime. Volunteer by contacting Herman Hodges at x3143 or [herman.hodges@blueridge.edu](mailto:herman.hodges@blueridge.edu).*

**Summary of Results on Key Strategy Indicators**

*Not shown. A line graph plotting annual progress on one measure for each strategy. They include:*

- *Strategy #1: Percentage of training events rated successful or very successful. Goal 100%*
- *Strategy #2: Net overall revenue growth. Goal 25%*
- *Strategy #3: Time to degree, four years or less. Goal 95%*
- *Strategy #4: Economic development participant satisfaction. Goal 5.0 of 5.0*
- *Strategy #5: Net revenue from sales of model general education curriculum. Goal: \$3m annual sales.*

*The discussion of the results chart below will describe the promising trends it shows, how they define progress toward a transformed University, and what needs to be done next to continue this progress.*

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Description</i>
<p><b>Strategy #1: Develop the Capacity for Transformation for All Members of the University Community.</b> (Professor Darius Keller, College of Management)</p>	<p><b>Accomplishments:</b> An annual professional development plan for every faculty and staff member, focused on contributions to the transformation. Training was increased, concentrated on those participating in the University’s transformation. Success in this strategy included completed professional development plans and employees seeing the training as providing them with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed. At the end of the second year of the Campaign, 100 percent of employees had a professional development plan and at the end of the fifth year of the campaign 85 percent of the trainings were assessed by employees as successful or very successful. Employee surveys report that the training has enabled them to participate confidently in the University’s transformation efforts and raised morale.</p> <p><b>Plans for Next Year:</b> To increase the number of employees receiving training by 150 and raise training success rating to 90 percent.</p>
<p><b>Strategy #2: Open up and Curate the University’s Portfolio of Learner Experiences.</b> (Dean Howard Keller, Dean of Continuing Education)</p>	<p><b>Accomplishments:</b> Over the first three years of the Campaign, using Business Model Canvas, every program was reviewed for simplification opportunities and for potential to open up and curate learner experiences in its disciplinary area and operate more efficiently, helping Blue Ridge fulfill its vision and produce greater value for learners and communities. Our initial measure of success was percentage of reviews completed on time. After the third year, increased enrollment and net revenue growth of each program and new program development and partnerships became the focus. All programs are expected to post 25 percent net overall revenue growth by 2030, despite declining traditional markets.</p> <p><b>Plans for Next Year:</b> Building on the fifth-year achievement of ten percent overall net revenue growth, post four percent net revenue growth in the 6<sup>th</sup> year. Programming efforts to reach this goal will include extension of online teacher education throughout the South and significant initiatives and partnerships in curated, perpetual learning experiences for alumni.</p>

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Description</i>
<p><b>Strategy #3: Significantly Increase Affordability at All Stages of Learners’ Lives.</b></p>	<p><b>Accomplishments:</b> In the first three years we tracked execution progress on the expedition maps for this strategy. After that we began to track progress toward the goals of time to degree in four years or less for 95 percent of our student population and 35 percent graduating in three years. At the end of year five, those numbers were 87 and 37 percent.</p> <p><b>Plans for Next Year:</b> The goals for year six are 90 and 40 percent respectively. This progress will be enabled by continued focus on student progress and retention, expanding our early pathways to employment programs and expansion of Free-Range and DIY Learning opportunities.</p>
<p><b>Strategy 4: Actively Engage in Regional Development and Revitalization</b></p>	<p><b>Accomplishments:</b> Blue Ridge has led the creation and operation of the Northwest North Carolina Regionalization Network (NNCRN). The Network has brought together key workforce and economic development players in the region who meet monthly and have piloted development of three high leverage programs for the region. Faculty, students and alumni from NNCRN member institutions have become much more involved in development and revitalization efforts in our region. We have become the “go to” institution to pilot new initiatives for the North Carolina Department of Economic Development. Strategy measures include the number of model programs for regional development created and implemented and satisfaction of participants in Blue Ridge’s regional development activities. At this five year mark, Blue Ridge has developed three model programs attracting \$5.5m in funds and received a 4.3 of 5-point participant satisfaction rating.</p> <p><b>Plans for Next Year:</b> To attract at least \$3.0m in state economic development funding and a 4.5 participant satisfaction rating.</p>
<p><b>Strategy #5: Reinvent General Education and Critical Thinking for All Undergraduate Students</b></p>	<p><b>Plans for Next Year:</b> This is the year this strategy will be initiated. Success measures will include completion of the design and implementation plan for a completely reinvented curriculum and faculty, student and employer assessment of the program design. The goal will be to create a genuinely innovative model hybrid/AI-rich curriculum with sufficient appeal to other institutions to produce significant net revenue through sales of the curriculum and associated materials.</p>

### *Resources for Transformation and Regeneration*

*To enable the work of the strategy coalitions and other teams, Blue Ridge University has established an Office of Innovation and Development that provides resources and support to foster program innovation at Blue Ridge. These services include:*

- Assistance with foresight, storytelling, planning from the future backwards methodologies,
- An innovation hub/community of practice for innovation and entrepreneurship,
- An active “sandbox” to test and demonstrate new prototypes and practices,
- New capabilities to refine and reinvent business models and value propositions,
- Access to wider networks of collaborators and partners, and
- Tools for transformation and including the Business Model Canvas, Design Thinking, Expedition Maps, and User Experience Journey Mapping

