

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2025, SUNY approved ESF's Fiscal Stability Plan ('Plan') to address a persistent structural budget deficit. Recognizing that successful implementation would require transparency, trust, and campus engagement, Academic Governance established the Stability Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC). Comprised of 23 student, faculty, and staff representatives, SPAC worked to translate the Plan's high-level financial targets into 1) key findings on their College-level impacts and 2) actionable, mission-aligned recommendations based on those findings and community ideas. The committee grounded its work in data analysis, scenario evaluation, and extensive community input, ensuring that progress toward financial sustainability does not come at the expense of ESF's academic excellence, reputation, student experience, and quality of worklife.

This summary provides an overview of the most essential findings and recommendations of the SPAC's semester-long effort. A more in-depth accounting of the committee's work, including supporting analysis and discussion, will be provided in a full report. SPAC recommendations are closely informed by community engagement, including three campus-wide town halls and interactive whiteboard sessions that generated hundreds of ideas and comments. Overall, this engaged input reflects a campus community that is both realistic about fiscal challenges and deeply committed to ESF's long-term success.

Cross-cutting themes:



Operational Efficiency: Pervasive concerns over strategic reorganization and operations after VSP departures, along with 'shared services' agreements, enrollment growth, and simultaneous near-term cuts in faculty, staff, and GA lines – all targeted in the Plan.



Mission-Critical Investments: Strong support for Graduate Assistants, Forest Properties, and Athletics as core elements of ESF's mission, reputation, student recruitment/retention, and experiential learning model. Sustaining ESF's Carnegie R2 status is a non-negotiable point.



Revenue Innovation: Broad interest in expanding dual-enrollment opportunities with SU, optimizing institutional assets, and pursuing new revenue streams. Formalize, evaluate, and optimize cost-benefit of Auxiliary Service Corp (ASC) and Syracuse University (SU) contracts.

The SPAC offers this executive summary (and a forthcoming full report) as a resource to support informed decision-making and continued dialogue. These findings and recommendations are intended not as endpoints, but as areas for further exploration and refinement through ongoing engagement with campus constituents. By building on the collaborative process that shaped this work, ESF has an opportunity to foster continued partnership across the community and to leverage the expertise of its stakeholders. With this shared purpose and direction, we hope to collectively move toward a mission-driven stability for ESF.

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Revenue Generation

Differential Tuition: Negotiate differential tuition rates from SUNY baseline, while developing a strategy to structure financial aid to maximize increased revenue and minimize additional out-of-pocket cost for students.

Auxiliary and Contract Review: Explore alternative approaches to formalizing the current structure of the Auxiliary Services Corp (ASC) and expanding its role in (non-tuition) revenue generation.

Asset Optimization: Analyze potential for increased revenue in several areas: parking, facility usage, Forest Properties, technical services, SU students, etc.

Reducing Expenditures

College-Wide Reorganization: Monitor and manage post-VSP transition through direct collaboration with those impacted by the reorganization and achieve full coverage for administrative, academic support, and facilities operations.

Workload Alignment: Ensure faculty workload allocations and staff performance programs are used to fairly and equitably realign duties, as needed, to reduce 'Extra Services' and 'Also Receives' payments in order to meet Plan targets.

Outsourcing Cost-Benefit: Define a set of fiscal and operational criteria for outsourcing or 'shared services' agreements, to ensure that they provide a net benefit to ESF, including SU contract, and communicate findings to campus.

Forest Properties

Fees and Revenue Control: Implement proposed Forest Properties fee and give Forest Properties access to proceeds of funds they raise (e.g., maple syrup and Christmas trees) to help offset operational and personnel costs.

Development: Create targeted fundraising campaign led by College Foundation and Alumni Association in partnership with Office of Communications and Marketing, Digital Storytelling Studio, faculty, students, staff and alumni.



Graduate Assistants (GA)

Recognize value: GA positions are critically important in all facets of ESF's mission, including instruction and research, and the diversity of our community.

Meet GA Needs: Initial estimates show that $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of GA spending (by Plan Year 4) will be needed to deliver just a portion of foundational 1st & 2nd year courses. We strongly encourage a College-wide assessment of GA needs be conducted to ensure instructional quality and to better manage scarce resources.

Protect R2 Status: Graduate Assistants (GA) are essential to ESF's Carnegie R2 classification – widely recognized as a 'non-negotiable' for the College's future.

Athletics

Recognize value: Student athletes contribute fundamentally to the College mission, exemplifying excellence in classrooms and competition. Loss of athletic opportunities will negatively impact recruitment and retention.

Fees: Support proposed increase of Athletics fee from \$115 to \$155 per semester; explore alternatives to coach hiring practices to reduce overhead.

Development: Create targeted fundraising campaign by College Foundation and Alumni Association to underwrite/sponsor our Athletics teams and programs.



Stability Planning Advisory Committee

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - WHITEBOARD SUMMARY

SPAC hosted 'whiteboards' in Moon Library and Gateway during the spring 2026 semester for the community to generate ideas via sticky notes. Each sticky note was copied as written to a digital whiteboard and a summary of these ideas is below.

Ideas for Budget Cuts:

- Reduce administration salaries (while not reducing faculty and GA salaries)
- Align administration roles with actual needs of institution
- Utilize SU resources (e.g., emergency management, parking, medical care)
- Partner with SU on certain sports
- Partner with Upstate on certain classes

Ideas for Revenue Generation:

- Partner with OCC and other schools to encourage transfers to ESF and Ranger School
- Establish dual enrollment options for local high schools
- Add adult learning evening courses, and community summer classes
- Increase sales of ESF products (e.g., paper, syrup, forest products, greenhouse crops)
- Rent out ESF spaces, including on Syracuse campus and forest properties
- Letter-writing campaign, lobbying, and asking for public support via flyers, social media, billboards, etc.

What's Missing & Should be Considered:

- Increase student housing
- Increase parking (fees, enforcement, and more spaces)
- Improve healthcare, accessible to mental health care, and general safety
- Increase partnerships with other institutions (e.g., Paul Smiths, Upstate, SU, Cornell) to better support students
- Increase transparency and communication between administration and students

