

## **Fiscal Stability Plan FAQs**

### **Q: Why was this stability plan developed?**

**A:** ESF delivers an education that our students simply cannot get anywhere else, not just here in New York, but nationwide. The purpose of this plan is to shore up the future of our vital institution so we can continue to carry out our mission of serving students and being a force to advance applied environmental science.

ESF faces a structural \$8.3 million deficit (2022/23 baseline) that must be eliminated. It's precisely because of the essential role we play in higher education that we must take steps to maintain ESF's place as a leader. A strong ESF is essential to fields like chemical engineering, landscape architecture, conservation biology, land management and surveying; employers like the state Department of Environmental Conservation; and to communities not only here in Central New York but across the country that benefit from our environmental research and work.

### **Q: Who was involved in the process of making these decisions?**

**A:** The president's Executive Cabinet has been instrumental in identifying areas both for growth and that require reducing expenditures. As we take the next steps, including where adjustments to our workforce are necessary, we are committed to continuing to work through a shared governance process that is transparent, collaborative, and inclusive as we continue to reduce our institution's budget deficit.

### **Q: How did ESF's deficit develop?**

**A:** Increased personnel costs have created a recurring imbalance in our budget. Over the last decade, ESF staffing has increased by 14% while student enrollment has grown by 1%. This imbalance is structural, meaning we must control expenses, not rely on one-shot revenue or other measures that can't deliver real long-term savings.

### **Q: What has already been done to reduce ESF's budget deficit?**

**A:** We are already taking steps to control spending across campus. These measures include slowing new hiring, delaying smaller capital spending on new projects, and eliminating non-essential spending.

### **Q: What is going to be done next to reduce ESF's budget deficit?**

**A:** Our plan is headlined by growth strategies. We will take steps to increase undergraduate enrollment, graduate school revenue, and our research portfolio. We plan to expand both summer and winter programming, increase online learning offerings, and double down on experiential learning that ESF is uniquely qualified to deliver for our students.

Balancing our budget also requires looking at our entire campus operations for efficiencies. We launched in August 2025 [a voluntary separation program](#) with support of our College Foundation that has received strong interest. Through the voluntary separation program and other staffing adjustments over time, we are targeting a net reduction in total

staff by 38 full-time employees over the next five years. We will also make adjustments to faculty workload to ensure we are operating efficiently and improving our students' access to renowned ESF faculty.

**Q: Does this plan include cuts to academic programs or other services?**

**A: No.** This plan does not rely on programmatic cuts. In fact, we are focused on growth strategies in a number of key areas, including expanding summer and winter programming, as well as online and experiential learning offerings. We also are receiving generous support from SUNY to maintain our Adirondack Park facilities and the Ranger School.

**Q: Is SUNY eliminating master's programs at ESF?**

**A: No,** this is untrue. Both SUNY and ESF remain committed to graduate studies. As a campus, we are responsible for determining the appropriate level of scholarships and stipends to attract students, promote research and scholarship excellence, and contribute to an overall fiscally sustainable budget. Simply put, while targeted support may be provided to students conducting research through grants funded by the federal government, state agencies, or philanthropy, a "free" master's program is not the norm in the higher education sector and is not financially sustainable. The changes we will make to the level of scholarships and stipends provided to graduate students are designed to ensure more financially sustainable operations while ensuring our students still can access resources they need to be successful. The bottom line is that our master's programs are here to stay and we would love to see them grow. Even in making these changes to ensure a stronger ESF as a whole, the ESF value proposition — delivering an affordable, nation-leading environmental science education — remains the same.

**Q: Are athletics programs changing at ESF?**

**A:** Our athletics offerings remain the same at this time. Like all areas across campus, athletics needs to be part of our work to align revenue with expenses. We will share more information as we work through the review and budgeting process with staff.

**Q: What is ESF's growth strategy?**

**A:** We are targeting increased undergraduate and out-of-state enrollment by the end of the decade, both of which reflect extraordinary student demand for the excellent education ESF is uniquely positioned to deliver. To get there, we first and foremost will continue to focus on our core strengths as one of the nation's pre-eminent environmental science colleges and market our significant value proposition across the state and nation. We will maintain, with the generous support of SUNY, facilities in the Adirondack Park and the Ranger School, which are unique offerings for the entire SUNY System that only we are equipped to provide. And we are exploring areas of growth, including additional on-campus housing that would allow us to accommodate more out-of-state students. Most importantly, we know that the steps we take today are only the beginning of our work, and we will be responsive to student needs and trends in order to sustain growth long term.

**Q: What is being done to attract new students and increase enrollment?**

**A:** While demographic changes have impacted university enrollment nationwide, enrollment at ESF has remained largely steady in the past decade because we lead in environmental science and forestry education. The class of fall 2025 is ESF's fourth largest first-year class since 2002, another positive step forward as enrollment also rebounds more broadly across the SUNY system.

Continuing to boost student enrollment will be key to reducing our institution's budget deficit. To do so, investment will be necessary in both in-state and nationwide enrollment campaigns to attract promising future environmental leaders who will benefit from ESF's unique, mission-driven educational offerings. Additionally, President Mahoney is committed to hitting the road herself to make a personal appeal to prospective students about ESF's value.

**Q: What metrics will ESF use to determine the progress of the stability plan?**

**A:** This is an iterative process that requires constant review and additional action when necessary. ESF is implementing a series of fiscal controls that boost financial transparency while also ensuring our resources are allocated to only the most necessary expenses that allow us to maintain our high-quality educational offerings. We are utilizing 2024-25 spending as our baseline to model our budgets for the next five years and must balance our operating budget by the end of 2027-28.

**Q: How is ESF utilizing state funding to address the structural deficit?**

**A:** Over the past three years (from 2023/24 through the current 2025/26 academic year), ESF has received a combined \$6 million in increased operating aid from the state, a 33% increase in state support that is critical to carrying out our mission to serve students. Our levels of state support are currently higher than they have been in nearly 20 years, and we are thankful to Governor Hochul, the State Legislature, the SUNY Board of Trustees, and Chancellor King for delivering for SUNY institutions statewide.

Addressing a structural imbalance between revenue and expenses ultimately must happen through local decision making. We cannot solely rely on direct state support or ask other schools in the SUNY system to make do with less to increase our state funding allocations. The most fiscally responsible path forward is to maximize the critical increases in state funding we have received by addressing our underlying structural budget deficit locally.

**Q: What is the future for ESF?**

**A:** ESF's future is bright! ESF plays a critical role in higher education not just within the SUNY system and New York state, but nationwide. Our mission remains as essential as the day we were founded. The plan we are implementing to stabilize our finances maintains high-quality academic programs, student services, and research for decades to come. And we will continue to update the plan in the coming years as conditions change to ensure the mission-driven education we provide is strong.

**Q: Is it true that SUNY is exploring selling SUNY ESF properties, including in the Adirondack Park.**

**A:** No. SUNY is proud of ESF's work in Adirondack Park and is fully committed to it.

**Q: Is it true that ESF's mission adjustment and base aid were eliminated and permanently reduced, respectively?**

**A:** During the Great Recession, many SUNY institutions saw an impact from the State's need to reduce funding due to the fiscal crisis. Between 2007-08 and 2011-12, ESF aid was reduced by \$5.7 million. However, as described above, direct state support for ESF over the last three budgets has increased by \$6 million, a 33% increase.