YOUR COLLEGE

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN REPORT

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Prepared By

GSH Education Group

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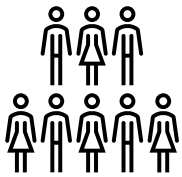
INTRODUCTION

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN PURPOSE

The GSH Education Group conducted extensive research across various areas to provide Your College leadership with reliable data for strategic planning initiatives. With over 25 years of specialized experience in higher education planning services, our team carefully selected specific data points that are recognized as reliable indicators for planning. Instead of trying to analyze every available data element, we concentrated on gathering targeted insights that can effectively guide future institutional activities and decision-making processes.

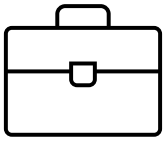
Environmental scanning represents a systematic approach to identifying and analyzing external trends, issues, and developments that may impact higher education institutions. This methodical process enables colleges to detect potential shifts in their operating environment and develop strategic responses to these changes. In today's rapidly evolving landscape, colleges face constant transformation, presenting challenges and opportunities requiring thoughtful navigation to maintain efficiency and effectiveness in the future.

The primary purpose of this scanning process is to provide institutional stakeholders with early awareness of significant external changes, allowing decision-makers sufficient time to formulate appropriate responses proactively, predict future trends, and incorporate this understanding into the college's strategic direction. Environmental scanning typically initiates the strategic and academic planning processes and is a fundamental component of a comprehensive strategic plan. The initial phase requires establishing baseline information through detailed analysis of primary and secondary data sources at national, state, regional, and local levels. Key analytical areas include demographics, education, economy and workforce, social and political, and technology trends.

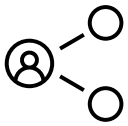


DEMOGRAPHICS

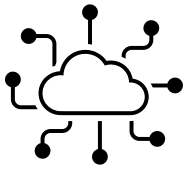
EDUCATION



ECONOMY & WORKFORCE



SOCIAL & POLITICAL



TECHNOLOGY

DEMOGRAPHICS

SPOTLIGHT AREA

The study of demographics is essential because it helps the college analyze how the regional population changes over time. This knowledge is important for environmental scanning, as it allows one to understand and predict how demographic shifts will affect the institution in the future. One of the biggest challenges for colleges is anticipating and preparing for the number of incoming students. The size of the student body impacts nearly every aspect of an institution's operations. By analyzing and understanding current and future population trends, colleges can forecast potential enrollment fluctuations that may influence their operations over time. This section will explore various population data that will shape Your College over the next 5 to 10 years.

NATIONAL POPULATION TRENDS

The United States is undergoing a significant demographic transformation. Within five years, a pivotal shift will occur as all baby boomers reach retirement age by 2030. Additionally, older adults are projected to outnumber children for the first time in 2034[1]. With natural population growth slowing due to declining fertility rates and an increase in deaths, net international migration is expected to become the primary driver of U.S. population growth after 2030[2].

DEMOGRAPHIC CLIFF

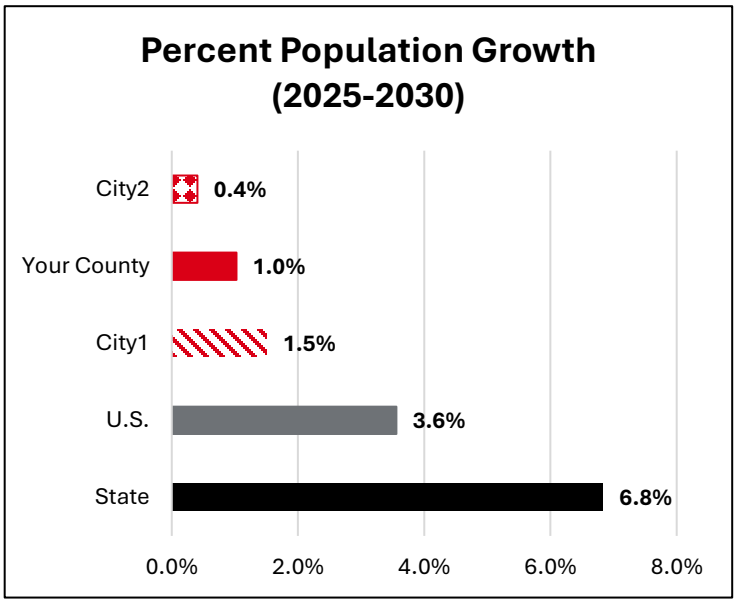
Higher education faces an imminent demographic cliff, with 2025 marking the peak year for high school graduates at approximately 3.9 million before entering a sustained 15-year decline[3]. By 2041, the traditional college-age population is projected to shrink by roughly 13 percent, creating what some call a "Blockbuster moment" – a disruptive turning point requiring higher education institutions to fundamentally adapt to survive.

This demographic challenge is exacerbated by lower fertility rates dating back to the 2008 Great Recession and current restrictive immigration policies, particularly significant as immigration-origin students have become increasingly vital to American higher education. Your state exemplifies this national trend, with projections showing high school graduate growth flattening in 2025-2026 before beginning to decline. In Your County, the number of 18-year-olds is forecasted to decline by 8.4% over the next 10 years[4].

While formidable, the demographic cliff need not be a college's destiny. Forward-thinking institutions can navigate this challenging landscape through proactive planning and nimble adaptation. Success hinges on confronting demographic realities, embracing diverse student populations, and developing sustainable financial models.

YOUR COUNTY & STATE POPULATION

According to estimates from the Office of Economic Opportunity and EASI, Your County is projected to experience modest population growth between 2025 and 2030. The county's population is expected to increase by 1,317 residents during this period, a 1.0% growth rate, reaching 129,781 by 2030. This growth rate is well below the state average of 6.8%, indicating that Your County is growing at a significantly slower pace than the state.



Among the major cities in Your County, City1 is projected to grow by 700 people (1.5% growth), while City2 shows only a slight increase of 65 residents (0.4%). In contrast, the statewide population is projected to grow by over half a million residents (531,841), and the U.S. population by nearly 12 million (3.6%) over the same timeframe[5].

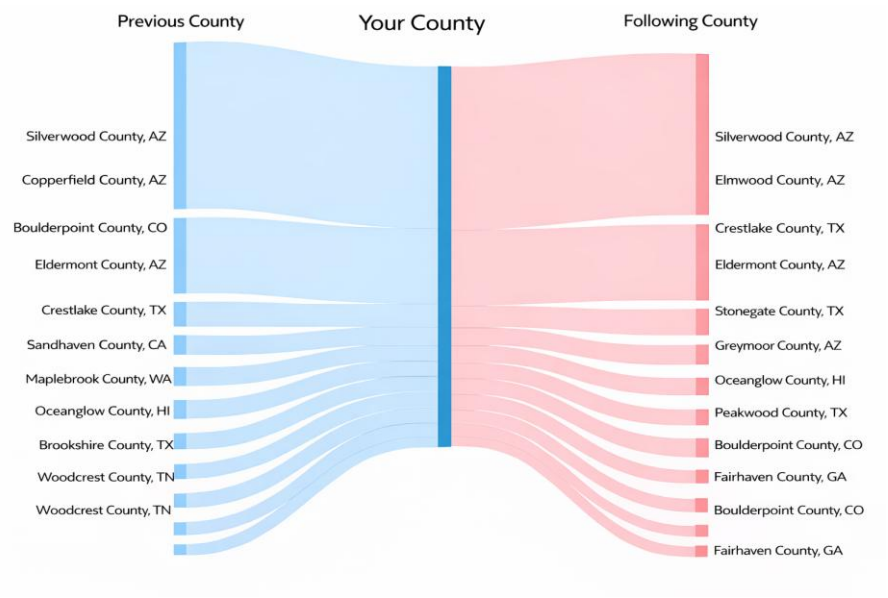
These estimates provide a baseline for understanding regional population dynamics and may be influenced by future shifts in economic conditions, housing costs, and immigration policies.

	2020	2025	2030	Net Growth 2025-2030	% Growth 2025-2030
Your County	125,447	128,464	129,781	1,317	1.0%
City1	45,308	46,563	47,264	700	1.5%
City2	16,534	15,879	15,944	65	0.4%
State	7,151,502	7,781,973	8,313,814	531,841	6.8%
U.S.	331,449,281	335,804,047	347,755,413	11,951,366	3.6%

Source: Data

NATURAL CHANGE & NET MIGRATION

Natural change and migration data for Your County present a mixed picture of population dynamics, highlighting both demographic challenges and modest in-migration gains. In 2022, the county experienced a natural population decline, with 1,233 births and 1,658 deaths, resulting in a net loss of 425 residents[7]. This negative natural change is an indicator of an aging population and lower birth rates, trends that are common in many rural or aging U.S. counties.



However, net migration provided a slight counterbalance. The county recorded 7,038 inbound and 6,859 outbound migrants, producing a net population gain of 179[8]. While positive, this influx is insufficient to offset the natural decrease.

Furthermore, foreign-born individuals comprised 11% of the population in 2023, reflecting moderate international migration[9]. Given increasingly restrictive federal immigration policies and heightened deportations, this segment may not grow substantially in the coming years, limiting its role in driving future population or economic growth.

Overall, Your County's slight net growth is migration-driven but fragile. Without stronger in-migration or shifts in natural change (e.g., increased birth rate), population stability and economic development may face long-term headwinds.

Your County Foreign-Born

	2023
Foreign-Born Persons	11%

Source: Data

Your County Migration

	2022
Inbound	7,038
Outbound	6,859
Net	179

Source: Data

Your County Natural Change

	2022
Births	1,233
Deaths	1,658
Net	-425

Source: Data

What Could This Look Like for Your Institution?

This sample provides a glimpse into the depth and quality of the GSH Education Group's environmental scanning work. Each scan we produce is built around your institution's specific service area, priorities, and planning context—there are no cookie-cutter reports.

A full environmental scan includes a comprehensive analysis across five domains:

- **Demographics**: population trends, age cohorts, migration patterns, and enrollment pipeline forecasts
- **Education**: K-12 performance, attainment levels, competitor positioning, and transfer patterns
- **Economy & Workforce**: regional employment, industry trends, occupational projections, wage data, program alignment
- **Social & Political**: policy shifts, funding dynamics, and community characteristics
- **Technology**: learning modality trends, infrastructure considerations, and emerging tools

Our scans are designed to support strategic planning, accreditation preparation, and institutional decision-making with current data and forward-looking analysis.

Ready to explore how an environmental scan could support your institution?

Contact Tom Hughes, Ph.D., to schedule a conversation.

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