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DEVELOPMENT
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Strategic Planning in Higher Education: A Guide for Leaders

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
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Strategic Planning in Higher Education: A Guide for Leaders

“Strategic Planning in Higher Education clearly articulates a proven methodology that will yield strategic thinking from groups and move organizations in an innovative direction. The exercises at each step of the process are quite useful and I plan to refer to them often in the future to help reinvigorate the planning process.”

Jeffrey N. Shields, CAE
Vice President, Community & Member Services
NACUBO

“The program offers a pragmatic approach to the issues surrounding strategic planning in higher education, including an open recognition of some of the idiosyncrasies of the higher education industry. It is an excellent reference document for relatively new leaders and a helpful refresher for the seasoned leader.”

Jerry Scoby
Vice President, Finance and Administration
Alma College
Alma, MI

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Tackling the Challenges of Strategic Planning

The *Strategic Planning in Higher Education* program and guide offer a comprehensive approach for creating, organizing, and implementing a strategic plan. The program provides step-by-step advice, case studies, and exercises for producing a successful plan, whether for an institutional initiative or a departmental review. The guide is designed specifically for leaders who are cognizant of the formidable challenges of strategic planning in an environment with myriad communication and organizational complexities.

Creating and Organizing the Plan

The *Strategic Planning in Higher Education* (SPHE) approach provides a seven-step blueprint for establishing planning priorities, guiding the process, and bringing the plan's goals to fruition. SPHE emphasizes key strategies for effective leadership, communication, and assessment throughout the seven planning phases.

Mission, Vision, and Values – reviewing the organization's guiding principles as a useful reference point for planning, especially when determining how to allocate resources and measure achievements.

Collaborators and Beneficiaries – identifying critical stakeholders, with particular attention to their expectations for the plan's development and implementation.

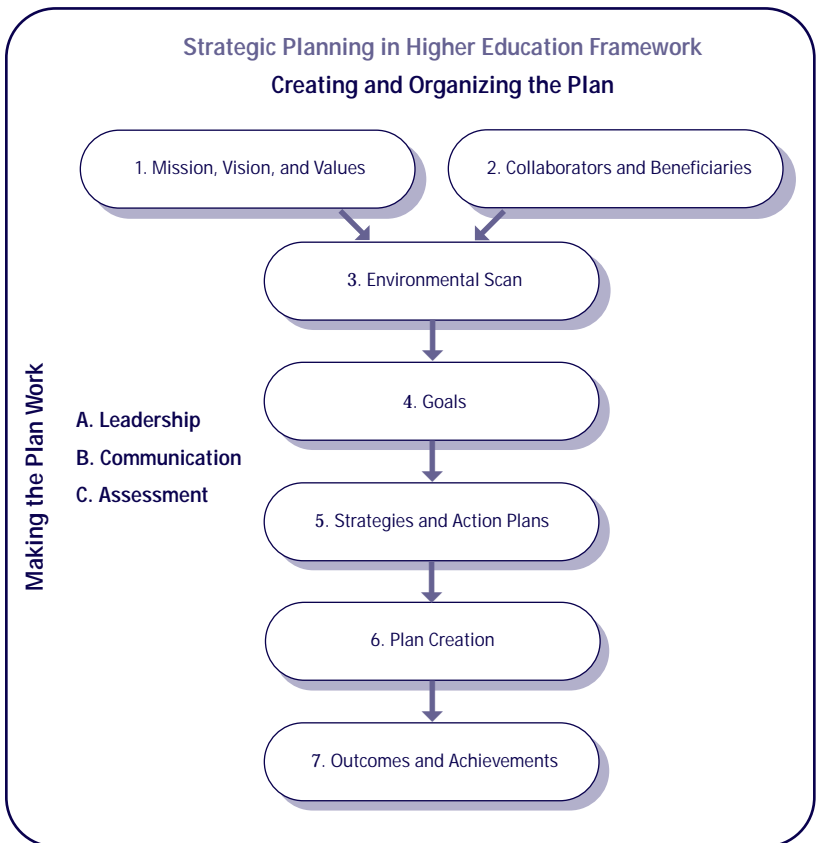
Environmental Scan – examining cultural issues, resource concerns, and other factors that may impinge on the planning process.

Goals – identifying an organization’s aspirations in tangible, achievable, and measurable terms.

Strategies and Action Plans – translating goals into a series of concrete strategies and activities with appropriate timelines.

Plan Creation – describing goals and strategies in a manner that is comprehensive, yet easily understood.

Outcomes and Achievements – monitoring progress and, most importantly, evaluating outcomes.



Making the Plan Work: The Three Imperatives

Plans fail for all sorts of reasons, but more often than not, problems arise from deficiencies in the planning process, rather than in the plan itself. Breakdowns in the process can often be attributed to shortcomings in leadership, communication, or assessment. Because of this, the SPHE model emphasizes these three imperatives.

Leadership – Defining leadership roles and responsibilities is essential to a plan's effectiveness. Unless a project's leaders are successful in creating a commitment to the initiative, a plan that's impressive on paper may fail to achieve its goals.

Communication – Without careful communication planning, organizational change is likely to meet with resistance by colleagues. Successful communication requires attention to each group likely to be affected by the planning process and the plan's goals.

Assessment – Ongoing attention to assessment is necessary to monitor a plan's progress and assess its outcomes. These appraisals provide guidance for developing preplanning strategies, monitoring the planning process, and judging whether a plan's activities and strategies are successful in fulfilling the organization's goals.

Attention to these three planning imperatives helps to:

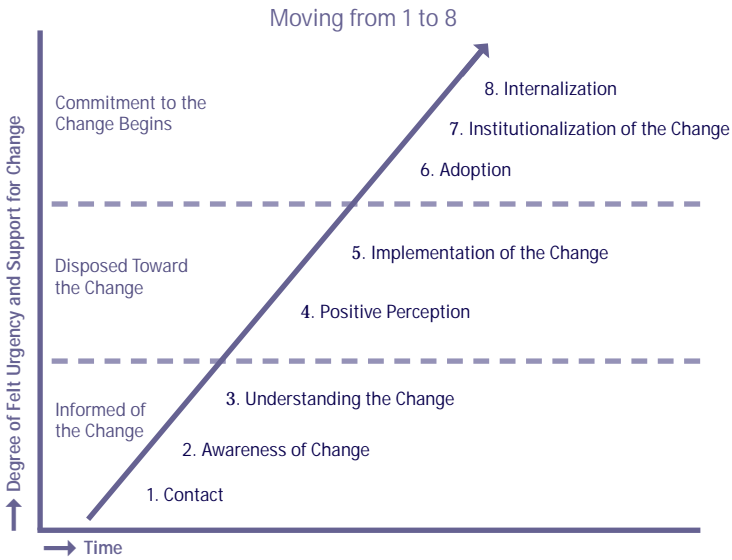
- Create a diverse leadership team with deep organizational knowledge, a variety of perspectives, and an understanding of decision-making powers and boundaries
- Foster readiness, receptivity, and a shared sense of the need for change
- Gain a historical perspective on efforts to change an organization – and how perceptions of previous planning efforts may exert an influence on current initiatives

- Anticipate concerns about the planning process and develop strategies to address those concerns
- Engage faculty, staff, and other groups to make sure the process is seen as open, inclusive, and worthwhile, thereby setting the stage for a commitment to the planning process
- Identify needed resources

Linking Assessment and Planning

The importance of linking assessment and planning has become increasingly apparent in recent years. Professional and regional accrediting association criteria place a growing emphasis on an integrated approach to assessment and planning. The Malcolm Baldrige framework for organizational excellence and the *Excellence in Higher Education Self Assessment* model – which adapts the framework to the specific needs of higher education – also underscore the importance of strategic planning as one of seven critical components of organizational effectiveness. SPHE provides a means to address key planning and change management issues with the kind of holistic approach that fits with these new models and helps foster a culture of continuous assessment and renewal throughout the institution.

Goals of the Change Management Process



Adapted from: R.I. Burton "Group Process Demystified." In J.W. Pfeiffer and L. Goodstein (eds.), *The 1982 Handbook for Group Facilitators*.

Your Organization's Future

The entire organization's future is at stake in strategic planning. And yet, if handled in an adhoc manner, planning initiatives can easily go awry. Colleges and universities, in particular, present unique challenges for strategic planners, given the lack of clear-cut incentives and the array of institutional subcultures that see themselves as having a stake in the planning process.

The *Strategic Planning in Higher Education* program was created to provide a practical and helpful guide to leaders of academic and administrative departments as they create and implement the plans and strategies that are so vital to their future.

A single case study followed throughout the guide, built phase by phase, provides a comprehensive example of the planning model. Exercises and imperative-focused reminders guide leaders through each step of the planning process.

“This practical field guide can serve the needs of a full spectrum of readers—from the experienced higher education planner to the newcomer who is just learning about the discipline. By carefully completing all the exercises, answering all the questions, and employing the many checklists for each phase of the planning process, a planning team is very likely to emerge with a final product that will truly strengthen the organization.”

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