

Glossary of Planning Terms

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is the process of defining its strategy, or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy, including its capital and people. Strategic planning engages the college community in determining the institution's long-term goals and then identifying the best approach for achieving those goals. Thus strategic planning is a tool for organizing the present on the basis of the projections of the desired future, that is, a strategic plan is a road map to lead an organization from where it is now to where it would like to be in five or ten years.

The reason for strategic planning is to assist the College in establishing priorities and to better serve the needs of the stakeholders. A strategic plan must be flexible and practical and yet serve as a guide to implementing programs, evaluating how these programs are doing, and making adjustments when necessary.

Whether the organization is big or small the most important impact of strategic planning should be to focus attention on why the organization exists and why a number of persons are interested and committed to its purpose to such an extent that they are willing to work to make it thrive. The process will require the Cabinet to build commitment or buy in from all members of the campus community. The Cabinet will also help to set priorities that will guide present and future decisions involving the acquisition and allocation of resources.

A strategic plan must reflect the thoughts, feelings, ideas, and wants of the community and mold them, consistent with the College's mission, vision and core focus areas, into an integrated document. The development of a plan requires much probing, discussion, and examination of the views of all constituencies. Every unit within the organization must have the opportunity to provide input to the plan at multiple points. It is then more likely that all will accept the plan, agree to its direction, and implement specific actions appropriate to their programs. In order to effectively and successfully implement a plan, all individuals involved in its implementation must be united in purpose and function.

Successful strategic planning advances the focus of an organization in that it generates:

- A clear understanding of the organization's mission, vision and values among key stakeholders
- A road map for action based on what is happening now
- Benchmarks by which we can determine achievement
- Information that can be used to market the organization

What are the defining Elements of Strategic Planning?

Strategic Planning is a continuous and systematic process where people make decisions about intended future outcomes, how outcomes are to be accomplished, and how success is measured and evaluated.

The essential elements of this definition include:

- **continuous:** Strategic planning is ongoing; it does not end with the publication of a plan; its success depends on it purposefully becoming an uninterrupted, and never-ending cycle.
- **systematic:** Any effective strategic planning process has a deliberate and specific methodology and a sequence of events; it is never haphazard.
- **process:** The value of strategic planning lies more in the journey than the destination. While strategic planning must indeed produce a product, a Strategic Plan document, the primary value comes from the teamwork, vision, commitment to and ownership of organizational success the planners gain through the process of making the decisions the document contains.
- **people:** A strategic planning process must involve all the right people, and those people must be ready and willing to contribute to the process.
- **decisions:** Strategic planning is a decision making process. Organizations that are ready to plan strategically have leaders who are ready to make decisions.
- **outcomes:** Strategic level planning addresses external results, or the organization's effects on the outside world, particularly how it affects its customers. An old adage states: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." Strategic planning is primarily about defining where "there" is, a type of roadmap outlining the outcomes and results designed to be achieved throughout the journey.
- **how outcomes are to be accomplished:** Strategic planners don't stop after they have defined the target future; they go ahead and select the roads that will get them there.
- **how success is measured and evaluated:** Strategic planning is all about succeeding. A well-written strategic plan will describe clearly how anyone can tell whether the organization is successful. The plan may measure intended future outcomes either quantitatively or qualitatively, but it always defines threshold criteria for achieving success.

What is a Mission Statement?

A Mission Statement is a brief description of an organization's purpose and primary objectives. A mission statement answers the question, "Why do we exist?" The mission statement articulates the organization's purpose both for those in the organization and for the public. The mission statement serves two functions: it ensures that everyone in the organization is united in the common purpose and it serves as a baseline for effective planning. Everyone in the campus community should be able to articulate this mission.

What is a Vision Statement?

The difference between a mission statement and a vision statement is that a mission statement focuses on an organization's present state while a vision statement focuses on its future. The vision statement presents a broad, aspirational image of the future that an organization is aiming to achieve.

Like the mission statement, the vision statement also defines the organization's purpose, but it expresses this purpose in terms of what the organization hopes to become. The vision statement should be forward-thinking, painting a picture of what we want the College to be at some date in the future; it should articulate the College we are trying to build. It should provide inspiration and capture our passion for Cedar Crest, so that it will elicit a commitment to action. A vision statement answers the question, "Where do we want to go?" When completed, the vision statement will influence all future planning and decision making, including the allocation of resources.

What is a Core Focus Area?

A Core Focus Area is a broad category of activity with a coherent theme and campus-wide reach. Core Focus Areas direct the College's work by defining centers of purposeful activity that help to fulfill the College's Mission.

What are Broad Principles?

Each Core Focus Area will motivate a more descriptive Broad Principle. The set of Broad Principles will inform planning activities in academic departments and administrative units, as faculty and staff consider how existing programs fit into the framework of these Principles. More importantly, this framework will provide the community with a foundation for proposing Key Initiatives that will allow us to realize our Vision.

What is a Key Initiative?

At the heart of our strategic plan will be the Key Initiatives. These are proposals from academic departments and administrative units that will determine our course for the future. All programs will be considered within the framework of the Broad Principles and those that hold the most promise for helping us to successfully realize our Vision will become the Key Initiatives of our Strategic Plan.

What is an Action Plan?

Once Key Initiatives have been identified, the strategic plan will need to specify how each Initiative will be actualized via an Action Plan. Each Action Plan will consist of a number of phases that will be carried out when the strategic plan is implemented. The phases will be “deliverables” whose achievement can be used to measure progress toward the realization of the Initiative.

What is the Master Action Plan?

Individual Action Plans will be collected into a Master Action Plan. By combining all Initiatives' Action Plans into one document, this Master Action Plan will essentially contain the implementation details for our Strategic Plan.