



Education
Advisory
Board

Community College Executive
Forum

Strategic Plan Implementation and Monitoring

At Large, Multi-campus Community Colleges



Research Brief

eab.com

Community College Executive Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Strategic planning committees develop three- or five-year strategic plans by engaging with faculty and staff members, soliciting feedback from community leaders, and prioritizing key areas of improvement. Some institutions hire external consultants to conduct listening sessions and focus groups and evaluate how stakeholders define student success and perceive institutional progress. Contacts also engage in environmental scanning exercises and literature reviews to assess the successes of peer institutions and understand the current economic, political, and social climate. Strategic planning committees typically consist of provosts, campus presidents, external consultants, and leaders from major institutional departments (e.g., finance, academic affairs, student affairs). Contacts limit strategic plan timelines to three or five years so that plans remain flexible and adaptable amidst changing environmental pressures.

Contacts organize strategic plans into broad, long-term goals, targeted supporting strategies, and department-specific key performance indicators (KPIs). Institutions develop between three and 10 strategic goals that typically include improving student success, enriching teaching and learning capabilities, streamlining institutional effectiveness, and developing new and innovative programs. Supporting strategies define targeted action steps that advance the strategic goals of the institution. For example, supporting strategies for enhancing student success may include better preparing students for future education or careers, improving persistence and completion rates, and increasing student engagement on campus. Strategic plans and supporting strategies operate as frameworks rather than strict benchmarks. Institutional effectiveness and planning staff instruct departmental heads to develop between three and five KPIs and metrics that directly address strategic goals.

Departmental heads implement strategic initiatives and submit annual monitoring reports to institutional effectiveness and planning staff. At the beginning of each academic year, departments submit preliminary KPIs and metrics to institutional effectiveness and planning staff for review and approval. Planning staff ensure that departments develop specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic KPIs before documenting annual targets in online tools and planning systems. KPIs and metrics typically include targets for retention, graduation, completion, and finances. At the end of each academic year, planning staff rate departments on their progress towards achieving metric targets (e.g., on target, requires monitoring, below target). Institutions employ online planning systems and dashboards to streamline monitoring and increase transparency of progress toward KPIs. Contacts report that allowing administrative and academic units to develop KPIs and metrics based on the type of unit, size of unit, and unit capacity successfully links departmental staff into the strategic mission of the institution.

Planning staff reform strategic plans and goals annually to adapt to changing environmental pressures and successes and shortcomings of the previous year's progress. Annual monitoring reports enable planning staff to track progress towards strategic goals. Institutional effectiveness and planning staff employ departmental monitoring reports to calculate the percentage of KPIs and metrics achieved and missed on a department-specific basis. These calculations inform reforms and alterations to supporting strategies and KPIs. In addition, administrators engage in regular environmental scans to ensure that strategic plans accurately address market changes, economic pressures, and social disruptions. One profiled institution operates on a three-year rolling strategic plan and annually updates goals based on environmental pressures.

Contacts emphasize effective monitoring practices and open communication channels with internal and external stakeholders for proper strategic plan implementation. Institutions rely on executive leaders to communicate and enforce strategic initiatives on an institution-wide basis. However, planning administrators at profiled institutions connect departmental staff into the strategic mission by soliciting feedback, constantly communicating strategic reforms, and rewarding departments for progress rather than punishing them for falling short of targets. Progress towards achieving strategic goals relies on backing from executive leadership, proper implementation by departmental heads, and constant monitoring of KPIs and metrics by institutional effectiveness and planning staff. Contacts report that tracking and monitoring on a department-specific and institution-wide basis greatly facilitates progress and focuses attention on crucial areas of improvement.

2) Planning and Development

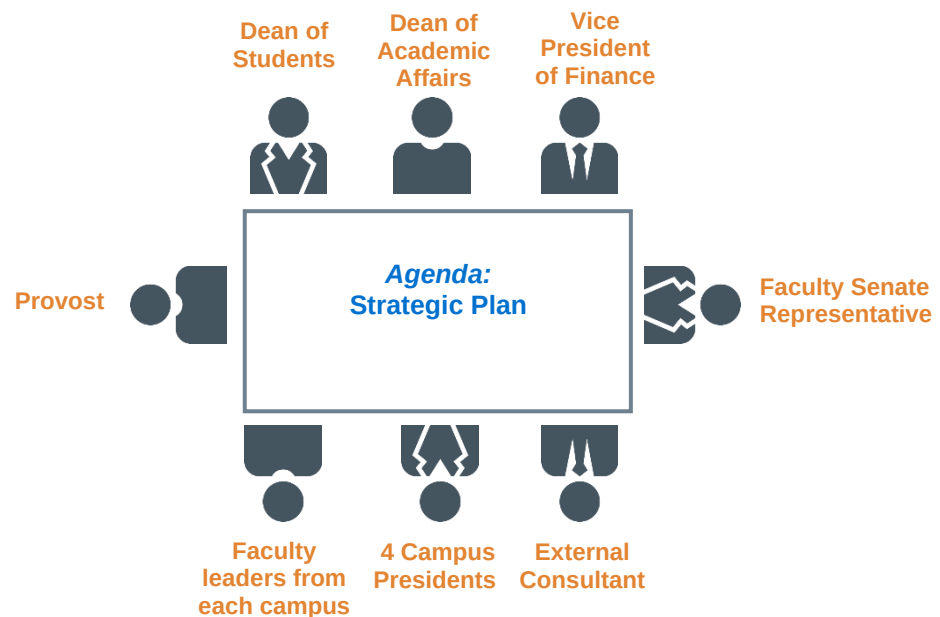
Planning Process

Planning Administrators Create Committees of Institutional Executives and Engage Community Leaders to Develop Strategic Plans

Institutional leaders conduct environmental scanning exercises, listening sessions with internal and external stakeholders, and literature reviews of best practices at peer institutions during plan development. Strategic plan development typically requires between 12 and 18 months of intensive planning and prioritizing. Planning units at **Institution A** and **Institution F** hired external consultants to conduct formal interviews with institutional leaders and focus groups with campus stakeholders. During interview sessions, external consultants asked stakeholders to define their idea of student success and evaluate the institution's progress on the previous strategic plan.

Planning staff at **Institution E** presented faculty, staff, and community leaders with retention, engagement, access, and completion statistics and asked all stakeholders to identify key areas of improvement as well as positive student success trends. Contacts report that listening sessions and data exercises help institutional leaders and planning staff prioritize strategies and initiatives.

Strategic Planning Committee at *Institution A*



Administrators at **Institution D** conducted an inclusive planning process by soliciting feedback from a variety of community leaders (e.g., Chamber of Commerce officials, government representatives, rotary club members, boards of local organizations). Contacts report that targeting outreach to influential community leaders enhances strategic plan prioritization activities.

One Year Strategic Planning Process at *Institution F*



Three and Five-Year Strategic Plans Allow Administrators to Adapt to Changing Environmental Pressures

Most profiled institutions operate on three-year strategic plans that are updated at the end of each academic year. Contacts report that flexible and short-term strategic plans better adapt to technological advances, demographic shifts, and changes in local competition. Due to **Institution F**'s large and complex campus structure, the district developed a five-year plan to ensure consistency and stability across its five campuses and 17 business centers. Contacts at **Institution C** may transition from a three-year strategic plan to a five-year plan to align the plan with other five-year institution-wide plans (e.g., campus master plan, facilities plan, IT plan).

Organization

Strategic Plans Set Broad Initiatives, Goals, and Focus Areas with Corresponding Action Steps for Implementation

Administrators at all profiled institutions designate between three and 10 overall focus areas and assign between five and 10 targeted action steps for achieving each broad strategic goal. For example, one of **Institution B**'s broad goals is "increase student completion through advanced education opportunities." The action steps for that particular goal include improving student preparation for higher education and future careers, enhancing the academic success of students in their first semester, increasing persistence rates, and revamping developmental education courses to ensure higher levels of student success. **Institution E**'s strategic plan incorporates three broad goals and five ends for achieving those goals.

Strategic Goals and Ends at *Institution E*

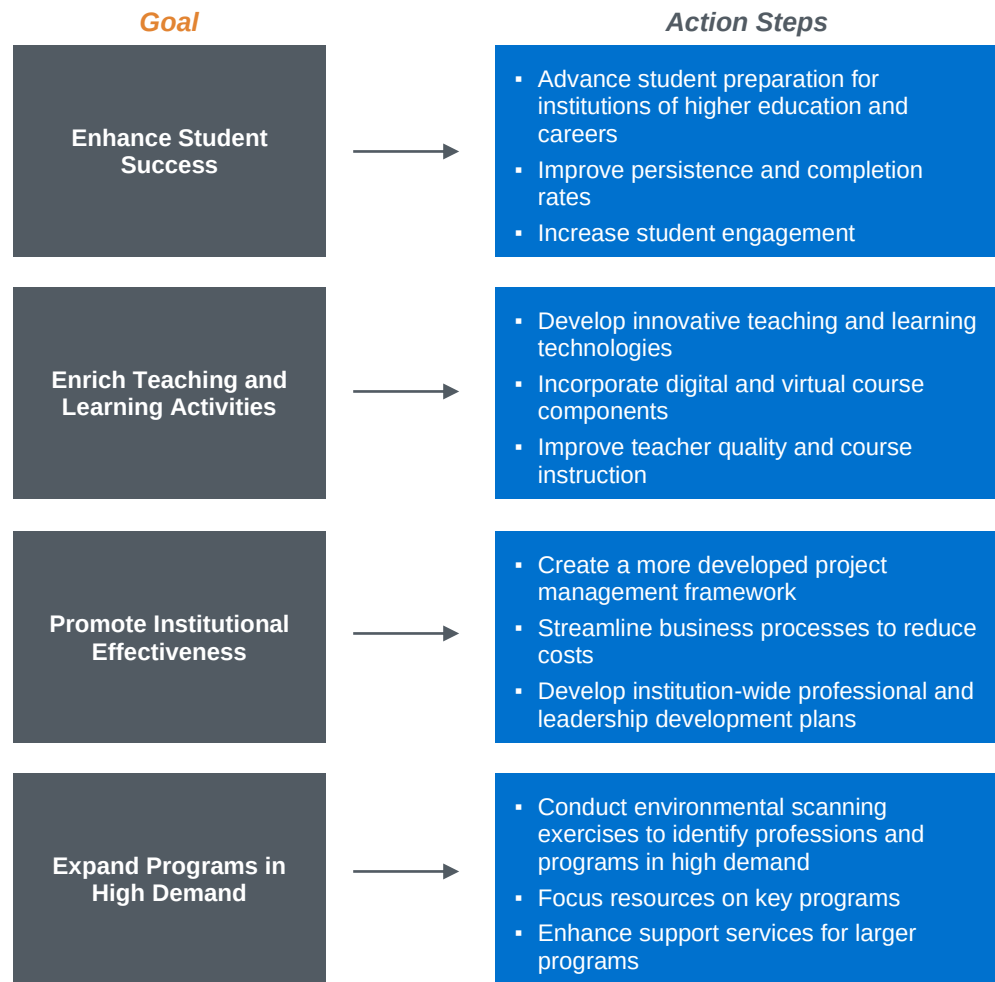
The Three Goals

- Increase graduation rates by 50 percent by 2018
- Close persistence, retention, and completion gaps with low-income, first-generation, and disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups by 2018
- Double annual giving by 2018

The Five Ends

- Access (e.g., enrollment, financial aid)
- Student Readiness (e.g., remediation, gateway courses)
- Student Success (e.g., retention, engagement, persistence, completion)
- Graduate Success (e.g., survey data, GPAs of transfer students at other institutions)
- Community Development (e.g. community events, endowment funds)

Common Goals and Action Steps at Profiled Institutions



While most institutions develop targeted action steps to address strategic goals, planning staff do not typically set benchmark targets within those action steps. Institutional strategic plans act as frameworks with action steps assigned as directives for individual departments to then develop targeted benchmarks, targets, and KPIs. Contacts report that setting rigid benchmarks in the short-term often discourages departments from setting high goals and, therefore, stunts long-term growth.

3) Implementation and Monitoring

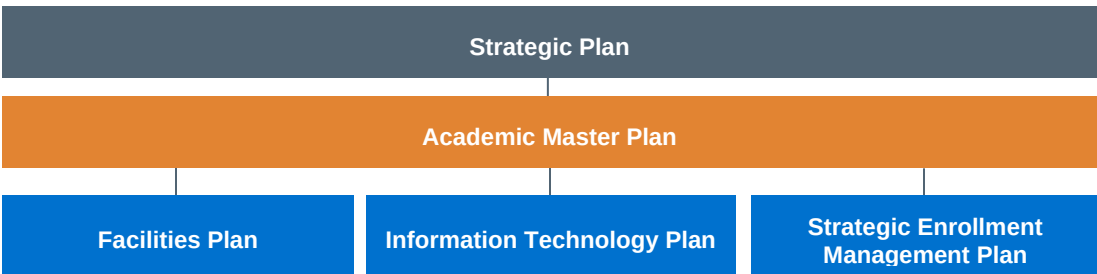
Implementation

Planning Staff Instruct Department Heads to Implement Strategic Plan Initiatives and Action Steps

Administrators do not create action teams to implement strategic plans within and across departments; department heads oversee implementation of the strategic plan within their academic or administrative unit. Profiled institutions support bottom-up implementation of strategic plans to encourage department staff to define supporting strategies and improvement steps depending on the capability, size, and type of administrative or academic unit. Contacts at **Institution A** report that department-specific implementation obligates department heads to develop at least three metrics that contribute directly to the college-wide plan. Therefore, the admissions department can focus efforts on improving access and increasing yield while IT departments can expend resources on streamlining business processes and enhancing technological support systems.

The President of **Institution E** holds all vice presidents accountable for a set of operational initiatives that apply to different administrative units. Operational initiatives include improving professional development activities in the human resources department, developing support technology for student learning within the IT department, and increasing revenue flows and grant acquisition within the advancement office.

Hierarchy of Institutional Plans at *Institution D*



Contacts at **Institution D** report that the strategic plan operates within an integrated and communicative framework with other institution-wide and department-specific plans. Department managers and deans develop administrative and academic unit plans that align and advance the strategic plan. While the strategic plan trumps both the academic master plan and all other department plans, all institutional plans mutually support each other's broad goals and initiatives.

Monitoring

Contacts Develop Annual Plans to Monitor Progress towards Strategic Goals

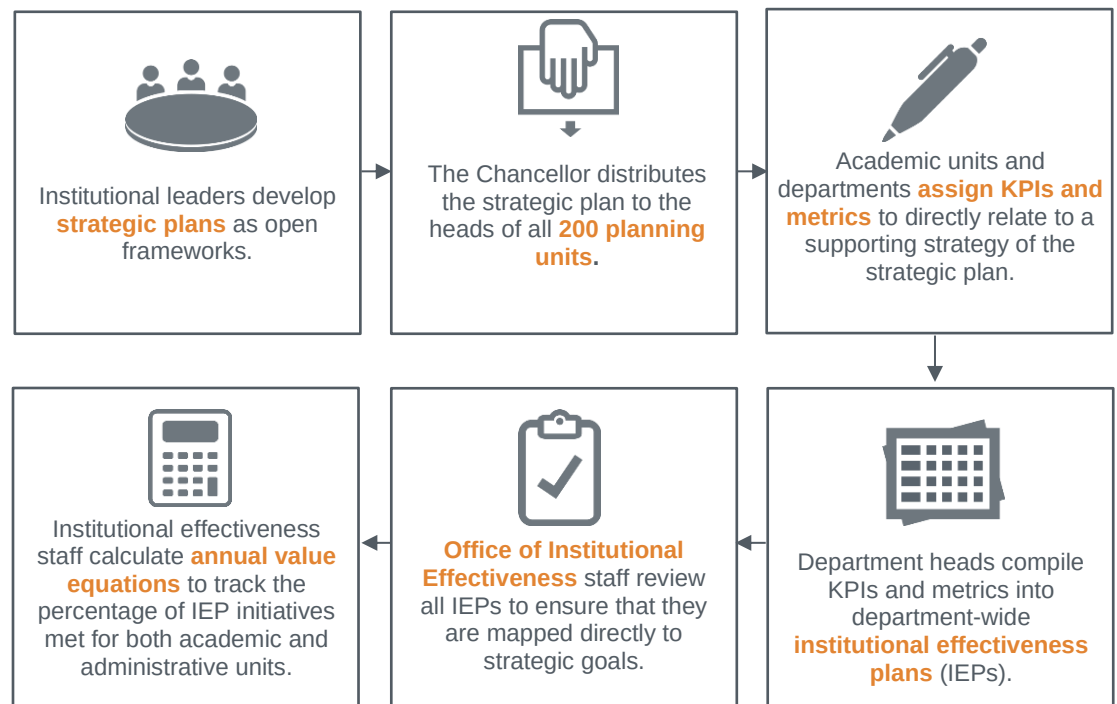
Institutional effectiveness and planning offices oversee departmental implementation of strategic initiatives by tracking annual plan progress. At the beginning of each academic year, planning units submit annual goals, plans, and targets to planning staff for review and approval. Throughout the academic year, department heads track and rate each initiative based on its progress towards achieving the corresponding strategic goal. At the end of each academic year, planning units develop new annual plans based on previous successes and shortcomings.

Annual Plan Implementation Timeline at *Institution E*



Administrative and academic units within **Institution F** create and implement annual institutional effectiveness plans, which outline department-specific metrics and goals that link directly to a strategic goal. Staff within the Office of Institutional Effectiveness review all departmental plans and monitor progress towards original targets.

Implementation Process at *Institution F*



Department Heads Develop Tailored, Measurable, and Realistic KPIs to Address Strategic Goals

Contacts monitor KPIs on an institution-wide basis and instruct departments to establish department-specific KPIs for tracking annual progress. Institution-wide KPIs typically include persistence, completion, retention, and graduation rates. Institutional research staff at **Institution C** collaborate with department heads to develop “departmental smart objectives,” which are attainable, specific, and timely annual goals. While planning offices hold departments accountable for meeting targets, departments are commended for making progress towards goals rather than punished for falling short of benchmarks. Contacts report that allowing departments to develop tailored metrics connects administrative and academic staff into the strategic mission of the institution.

Eight Key Metrics at Institution A

- Percentage of Students Completing Developmental English in 1 year (new incoming student cohort each fall)
- Percentage of Students Completing Developmental Math in 1 year (new incoming student cohort each fall)
- Percentage of Students Completing Gateway English in 2 years (new incoming student cohort each fall)
- Percentage of Students Completing Gateway Math in 2 years (new incoming student cohort each fall)
- Fall to Spring Retention Rate (new incoming student cohort each fall)
- Fall to Fall Retention Rate (new incoming student cohort each fall)
- Three-Year Graduation Rate
- Tri-C Share of American Graduation Initiative (Total Degrees and Certificates Awarded each academic year)

Online Planning Tools and Systems Track Progress towards Strategic Goals

The Office of Evidence and Inquiry at **Institution A** launched a new planning dashboard using Argos software in mid-November that lists each administrative and academic unit's KPIs and tracks annual advancement towards that goal. The dashboard also lists the prior year's metrics and sets additional two-year, three-year, and 2020 targets. At the end of each academic year, planning staff alter and adjust the 2020 target based on the institution's progress towards specific KPIs.

4) Evaluation and Outcomes

Annual Reviews

Annual Monitoring Reports Assign Ratings to Departments Based On Their Achievement and Improvement

The submission of annual unit effectiveness reports allows planning administrators to ensure that all departments are held accountable for their contribution to the strategic mission of the institution. When department heads submit annual plans to institutional research and planning units, planning staff benchmark progress and calculate the number of strategic initiatives achieved and missed. Planning staff encourage department heads to base upcoming annual targets on statistical analysis and

benchmarks of previous years. Annual monitoring reports at **Institution E** assign ratings (e.g., on target, requires monitoring, below target) to each individual initiative. Planning staff at **Institution B** host annual meetings to recognize departmental successes and enforce compliance with KPI reporting and assessment. Contacts report that defining, monitoring, and reassessing KPI targets on an annual basis facilitates progress towards strategic initiatives and identifies key areas of improvement.

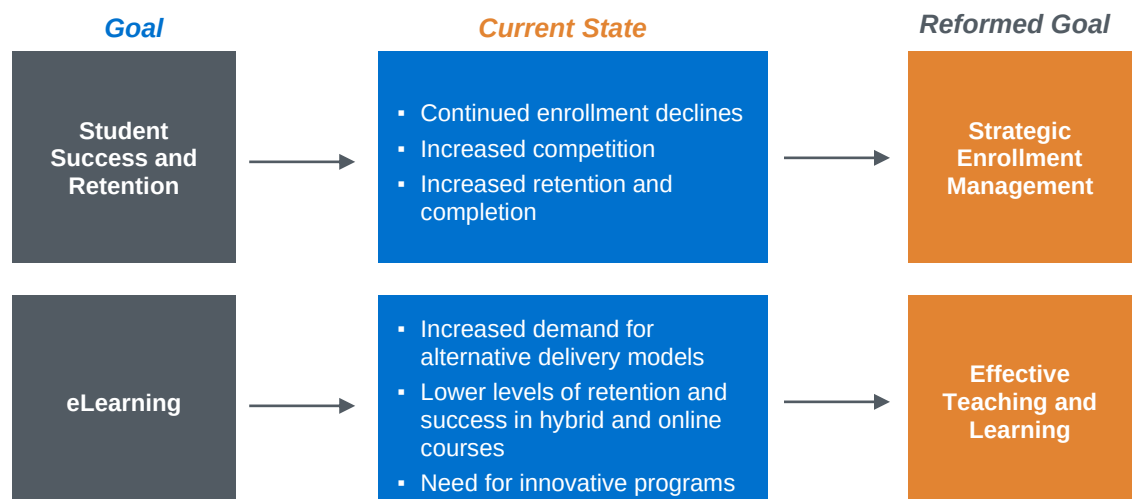
Annual Monitoring Reports at *Institution E*

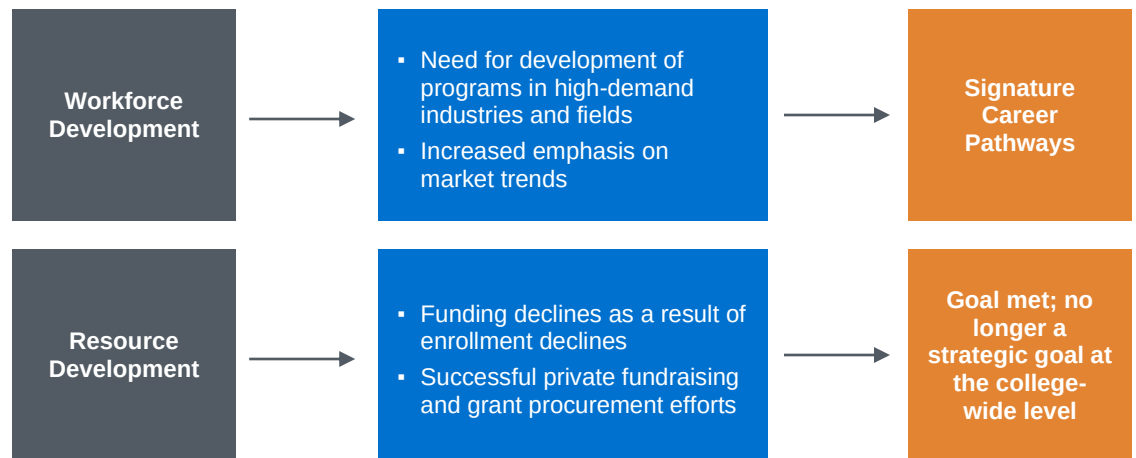


Contacts Adapt Strategic Plans in Response to Changing Environmental Pressures

Contacts report that integrating flexibility and adaptability into strategic plans and KPIs allows the institution to adjust to economic pressures and demographic shifts. Administrators at **Institution B** engage in annual planning exercises and update the three-year strategic plan on an annual rolling basis. After the completion of the 2013-2014 academic year, the strategic planning committee at **Institution D** reformed the institution's four strategic goals into three new goals for the 2015-2018 strategic plan based on a review of KPIs, environmental scanning exercises, and improvement assessments.

Outcomes and Reforms from *Institution D's* 2011-2015 Strategic Plan Assessment





Outcomes

Detailed Action Steps and Targeted KPIs Facilitate Progress towards Institutional Goals

Contacts design strategic plans by creating broad categories, supporting strategies, and department-specific KPIs so that planning staff can easily assess progress and identify at-risk areas for improvement. Planning administrators instruct departments to adjust KPIs and metrics based on the previous year's annual monitoring report. Contacts report that allowing departments to develop KPIs rather than mandating benchmarks enhances institutional communication and progress.

2013-2014 Outcomes at Institution E

Strategic Goal	2014 Target	2014 Outcome	Improvement Strategies
Student Access	Market share of full-time equivalent credit hour at or above 47.1%	46.7%	- Implement new enrollment management plan - Investigate new hybrid and online degree programs - Improve course design, course delivery, and content
	Full-time equivalent credit hour enrollment at or above 9,589	8,924	
	Racial and ethnic composition at or above 34.7%	40.0%	
College Readiness	Concurrent student headcount at or above 1,112	1,470	- Review curricular alignment of developmental courses with subsequent college-level courses - Expand concurrent enrollments in additional school districts - Increase college prep English course success rates
	Developmental course student success rate at or above 61.3%	61.3%	
	Gateway course student success rate at or above 60.7%	63.4%	
Community Development	Number of performing arts tickets sold at or above 2,151	1,858	- Increase the number of sponsors for the annual Arts Festival - Implement a business plan for the
	Attendance at annual Arts Festival at or above 22,444	17,844	

	Student and employee Wellness Center visits at or above 24,384	29,524	Performing Arts series
Student Success	Fall-to-fall retention at or above last year rate of 34.2%	33.4%	- Organize summer orientation sessions to increase student success - Increase participation in Success in College and Life course - Initiate an outreach program to new transfer students
	Three-year progression at or above last year rate of 59.1%	61.6%	
	Number of graduates at or above prior three-year average of 1,485	1,719	
Graduate Success	Transfer GPAs at or above transfer institution average GPA - University of Oklahoma: 3.0 - Oklahoma State University: 3.1 - University of Central Oklahoma: 3.0	- University of Oklahoma: 3.2 - Oklahoma State University: 3.1 - University of Central Oklahoma: 2.8	- Improve response rate of graduate students submitting surveys - Develop coordinated curriculum for students transferring to the University of Central Oklahoma
	First-time licensure pass rates at or above national pass rates for health professions - Nursing: 90% - Occupational Therapy Assistant: 81% - Paramedic: 77% - Physical Therapist Assistant: 84%	- Nursing: 97% - Occupational Therapy Assistant: 94% - Paramedic: 93% - Physical Therapist Assistant: 95%	

Open Communication with Stakeholders Enhances Strategic Plan Development and Implementation

While planning initiatives require the direction and enforcement of institutional leaders, contacts report that proper implementation and monitoring of strategic plans demands the support and backing of all administrative and academic units. Contacts develop inclusive planning processes and encourage stakeholder feedback so that departmental staff and external community leaders can offer advice, recommendations, and concerns to institutional effectiveness and planning staff. Planning units operate as supporting structures to guide departments towards achieving strategic goals rather than enforcing strict and rigid benchmarks. Since strategic planning processes occur over long periods of time, contacts emphasize clarity of goals and transparency of communication for effective implementation and monitoring.

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What organizational structures and processes do contact institutions utilize to develop institution-wide strategic plans?
- What considerations do administrators at contact institutions examine when determining appropriate time lines for strategic plans?
- How do contact institutions engage stakeholders from the local community throughout the strategic planning process?
- How do administrators at contact institutions organize and implement strategic plans?
- Do contact institutions create action groups to execute strategic plan implementation or delegate implementation to existing departmental working groups?
- How do individual departments work to support the institution-wide strategic plan, especially if a particular department's area is not identified in the specific goals or objectives of the plan?
- How do administrators at contact institutions integrate strategic planning with other institution-wide planning efforts?
- How do administrators at contact institutions monitor the progress and development of strategic plans?
- What administrators or standing committees are responsible for strategic plan monitoring at contact institutions?
- How do administrators at contact institutions evaluate the effectiveness and progress of strategic plans at various levels?
- Do administrators at contact institutions develop key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure progress towards strategic goals and objectives?
- To what extent do administrators at contact institutions engage in formal reviews and evaluations of strategic plans?
- What guidance and advice do administrators at contact institutions offer others for effective strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (<http://www.eab.com>)
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (<http://chronicle.com>)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)
- Institutional Websites

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators who supervise strategic planning initiatives at large, multi-campus community colleges.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment	Classification
Institution A	Midwest	32,000	Associate's – Public Urban-serving Multicampus
Institution B	South	60,000	Associate's – Public Urban-serving Multicampus
Institution C	South	55,000	Associate's – Public Suburban-serving Multicampus
Institution D	Mountain West	26,000	Associate's – Public Urban-serving Multicampus
Institution E	South	15,000	Associate's – Public Urban-serving Single Campus
Institution F	South	50,000	Associate's – Public Urban-serving Multicampus