IT Strategic Planning Preparation Playbook

Tools, Checklists, and Guidelines to Initiate the IT Strategic Planning Process

PREPARE → **DISCOVER** → **DISTILL** → **FINALIZE** → **IMPLEMENT**

How to Use This Playbook

EAB Center of Excellence: IT Strategic Planning

Plug-and-Play Resources to Guide Your IT Strategic Planning Process

This Center of Excellence includes coverage of the IT strategic planning process with basic guidelines, workshops, templates, and diagnostic tools to educate peers and stakeholders, as well as advanced practices effective at higher education institutions. It also offers guidance and support to replicate those practices on your campus.

IT Strategic Planning Preparation Playbook

This playbook supports work in the **Prepare** phase to assess your readiness for IT strategic planning, improve your chances of success, create IT strategic planning working and oversight groups, and make basic decisions about the nature of the plan you want to build.

For information about the next phase of the process, see the *IT Strategic Planning Discover Playbook, Parts I and II*. Process steps and tools are numbered consecutively in the two Discover playbooks.

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| PREPARE | DISCOVER | DISTILL | FINALIZE | IMPLEMENT |

Prepare Phase: The resources in this playbook are used during the Prepare Phase of IT strategic planning, when planners examine readiness for undertaking an IT strategic planning process, carry out necessary foundational work, select participants, and develop a project plan.
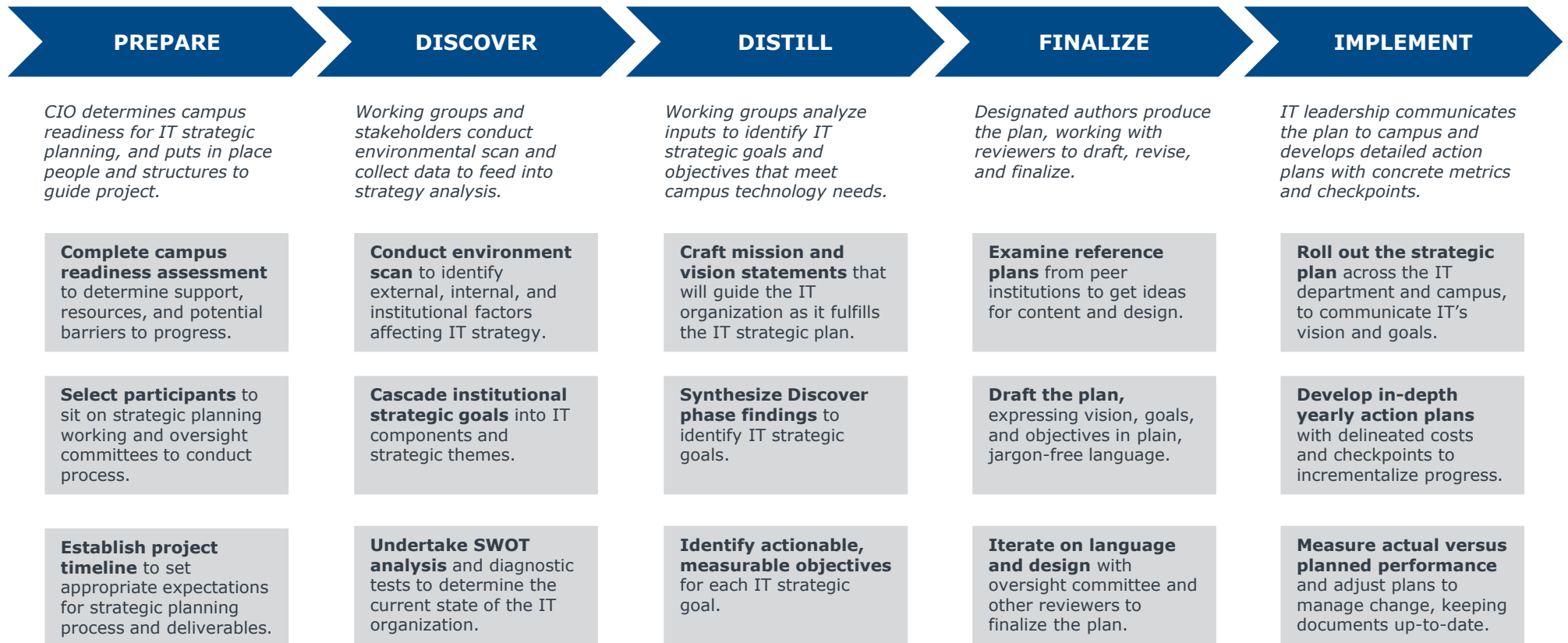
Included in This Playbook

IT Strategic Planning: A Phased Process in Support of Institutional Goals

In general, strategic planning is the process of systematically setting an institution's goals, organizing efforts to achieve them, and setting ways to measure results. IT strategic planning is a similar process conducted with respect to the information technology function, and undertaken to support the institution's strategy. The ultimate purpose of IT strategic planning is to ensure that IT efforts are organized so as to make the maximum contribution to institutional strategic goals.

An IT strategic plan documents and communicates the outputs of this process: the IT organization's vision, mission, and strategic goals and objectives. Creating an IT strategic plan consists of five phases, outlined below. Working through each phase will help the IT organization analyze institutional needs, identify the IT goals and objectives that will serve them, and develop a roadmap for action.

This **Preparation Playbook** supports work in the **Prepare** phase.
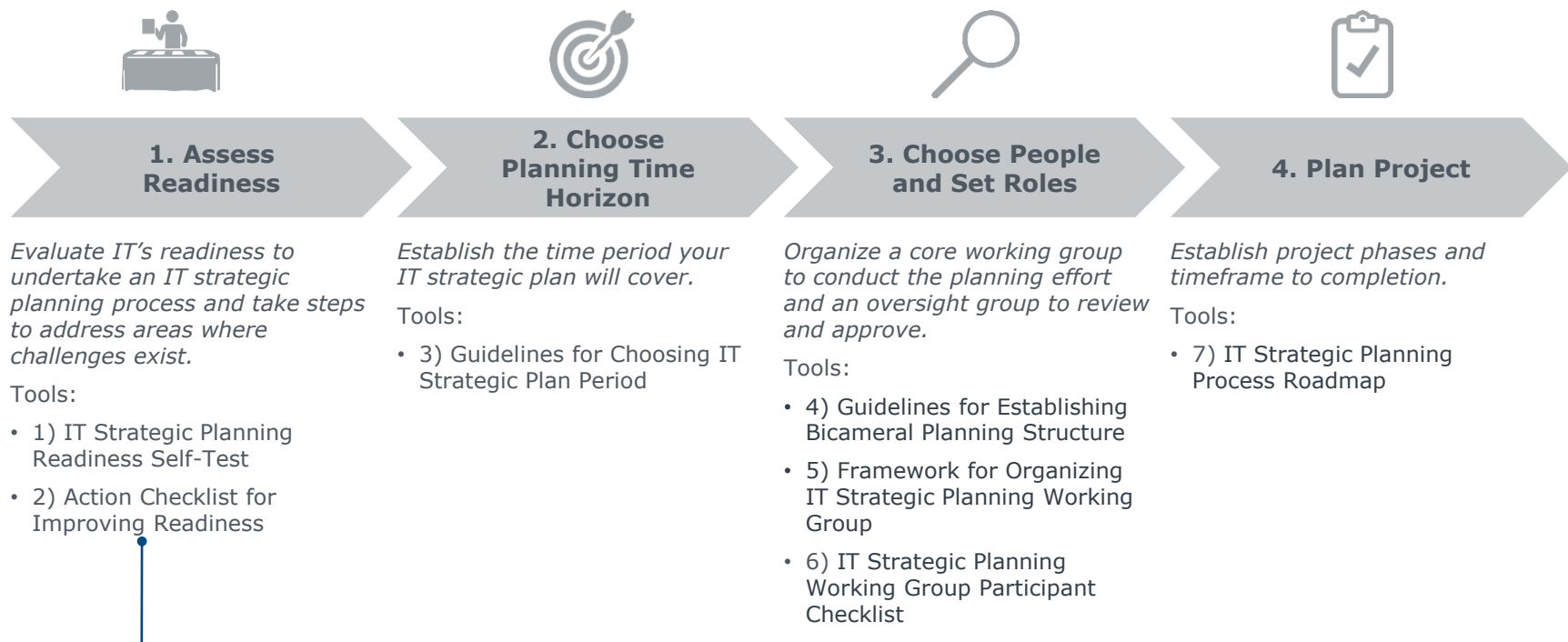
PREPARE	DISCOVER	DISTILL	FINALIZE	IMPLEMENT
CIO determines campus readiness for IT strategic planning, and puts in place people and structures to guide project.	Working groups and stakeholders conduct environmental scan and collect data to feed into strategy analysis.	Working groups analyze inputs to identify IT strategic goals and objectives that meet campus technology needs.	Designated authors produce the plan, working with reviewers to draft, revise, and finalize.	IT leadership communicates the plan to campus and develops detailed action plans with concrete metrics and checkpoints.
Complete campus readiness assessment to determine support, resources, and potential barriers to progress.	**Conduct environment scan** to identify external, internal, and institutional factors affecting IT strategy.	**Craft mission and vision statements** that will guide the IT organization as it fulfills the IT strategic plan.	**Examine reference plans** from peer institutions to get ideas for content and design.	**Roll out the strategic plan** across the IT department and campus, to communicate IT's vision and goals.
Select participants to sit on strategic planning working and oversight committees to conduct process.	**Cascade institutional strategic goals** into IT components and strategic themes.	**Synthesize Discover phase findings** to identify IT strategic goals.	**Draft the plan,** expressing vision, goals, and objectives in plain, jargon-free language.	**Develop in-depth yearly action plans** with delineated costs and checkpoints to incrementalize progress.
Establish project timeline to set appropriate expectations for strategic planning process and deliverables.	**Undertake SWOT analysis** and diagnostic tests to determine the current state of the IT organization.	**Identify actionable, measurable objectives** for each IT strategic goal.	**Iterate on language and design** with oversight committee and other reviewers to finalize the plan.	**Measure actual versus planned performance** and adjust plans to manage change, keeping documents up-to-date.

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The Prepare Phase: Setting the Stage for IT Strategic Planning

Sound Preparation Identifies and Mitigates Risks to the Planning Process

IT strategic planning is a multi-step process that requires the cooperation of many people and the collection of a lot of information. It asks for commitments from people who have many responsibilities and commits the IT organization to the creation of a future vision in which vital interests of constituents across the institution are at stake.

In short, it is not a small commitment, and CIOs need to take the time to check their readiness—and the institution's—to undertake an IT strategic planning process. It may be that the time is not right, or that some preparatory work is needed before embarking. Once you've decided to start, you will need to choose a planning timeframe, assemble the right people into working groups, and develop a project plan.

Four Steps to Preparing for an IT Strategic Planning Effort

1. Assess Readiness	2. Choose Planning Time Horizon	3. Choose People and Set Roles	4. Plan Project
Evaluate IT's readiness to undertake an IT strategic planning process and take steps to address areas where challenges exist.	*Establish the time period your IT strategic plan will cover.*	*Organize a core working group to conduct the planning effort and an oversight group to review and approve.*	*Establish project phases and timeframe to completion.*
Tools:	Tools:	Tools:	Tools:
• 1) IT Strategic Planning Readiness Self-Test	• 3) Guidelines for Choosing IT Strategic Plan Period	• 4) Guidelines for Establishing Bicameral Planning Structure	• 7) IT Strategic Planning Process Roadmap
• 2) Action Checklist for Improving Readiness		• 5) Framework for Organizing IT Strategic Planning Working Group	
		• 6) IT Strategic Planning Working Group Participant Checklist	

Need to communicate what IT strategic planning is all about? See EAB's downloadable presentation, "*Making the Case for IT Strategic Planning*."

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Assess Readiness

Resources to Evaluate Preparedness and Set a Strong Foundation for IT Strategic Planning

STEP **1**

- Readiness Assessment Fundamentals
- IT Strategic Planning Readiness Self-Test
- Action Checklist for Improving Readiness

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Readiness Assessment Fundamentals

If you do not have the right partners and support, your planning effort may lose momentum or point IT in the wrong direction. Customers who are at their limit of absorbable change, or who feel there are unaddressed IT service issues, may see the IT strategic planning process as an unnecessary distraction. Use the *IT Strategic Planning Readiness Test* on the following pages to decide whether your campus is ready to proceed, and to identify the actions that will build a foundation for success.

Six Dimensions of IT Strategic Planning

Leadership Support

Clear support from institutional leaders is essential to establishing IT strategic planning as a priority and to rounding up partner assistance.

Institutional Strategic Plan

The key to successful IT strategic planning is alignment to institutional goals. If such goals are not clearly documented in an institutional strategic plan, you will have to find alternate sources of guidance.

Partners and Resources

Be sure IT and customer participants alike can credibly commit appropriate effort to the task.

Data Culture

Trusted, high-quality data is a primary input to IT strategic planning and affects the credibility of the plan. Its unavailability may indicate an area needing strategic attention.

IT Environment

Institutional support for IT strategic planning is easier to mobilize in a stable environment. Address chronic service issues and conclude disruptive projects before launching your planning process.

Communication

The IT strategic plan is not just for IT—it is an institutional document that must communicate with diverse audiences. If you need to develop writing, design, and dissemination capabilities, identify those gaps early in the process.

> **▶ Warning Signs That IT Strategic Planning May Have to Wait**
>
> - Chronic, unaddressed IT service issues
> - Major implementations or business process changes under way
> - Leadership in flux or not publicly committed to effort

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Tool 1: IT Strategic Planning Readiness Self Test

Grading Key

Please indicate **how well** each statement describes your institution.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	Not at all	Poorly	Somewhat	Fairly well	Well

Leadership Support	Institutional Strategic Plan	Partners and Resources	Data Culture	IT Environment	Communication
Our IT strategic planning initiative has vocal support from one or more non-IT executive sponsors. Score:_____	Our institution has a published, up-to-date institutional strategic plan; or if not, we can describe a set of current, widely-accepted institutional strategic goals. Score:_____	We can recruit stakeholders familiar with IT issues in their domains to join our strategic planning effort (e.g., IT advisory group members). Score:_____	We can access high-quality data as needed to support IT strategic decision-making. Score:_____	Overall, IT currently provides reliable basic services and achieves acceptable levels of customer satisfaction. Score:_____	The IT organization can draw upon strong writing and editing skills for communicating with non-technical audiences. Score:_____
Executive leadership (e.g., President, Provost, VPs) sees strategic value in IT. Score:_____	The IT organization participates actively in institutional strategic planning initiatives. Score:_____	Key IT participants can contribute 10%-20% of their time to the IT strategic planning effort across the span of the project. Score:_____	Our institutional culture embraces the use of KPIs or other metrics to measure progress toward strategic goals. Score:_____	We have a stable IT environment, with no large-scale or high-risk projects underway (e.g., new ERP or core system implementation). Score:_____	The IT organization can make use of a robust set of channels for communicating strategic issues and goals (e.g., website, blog, town halls, social media). Score:_____
Subtotal:	Subtotal:	Subtotal:	Subtotal:	Subtotal:	Subtotal:

Sum of Subtotals = Your Readiness Score

Tool 1: IT Strategic Planning Readiness Self Test

Readiness Score: _____

Copy your readiness score from the previous page and compare it to the score ranges below to see how you should approach an IT strategic planning initiative.

12-24

Prepare the Ground

Your IT strategic planning capabilities do not add up to a critical mass. Focus on increasing your institution's and your organization's ability to address strategic issues before starting an active planning process. Foundational efforts include stabilizing IT service delivery, gaining the support of leadership, clarifying institutional goals, and developing informative, supporting relationships with key stakeholders.

25-45

Proceed with Care

You have some preliminary issues to address, but there is a substantial basis for taking on an IT strategic planning effort. Sit down with leadership, stakeholders, and senior IT management to identify pre-launch issues that may need to be rectified. Build extra time into your planning process to make up for issues like unclear institutional strategic guidance, untested planning partners, or IT staff unfamiliar with strategic planning.

46-60

Ready to Roll

The essentials are in place and you are ready to launch the IT strategic planning process in earnest! Your institution knows its goals, your IT organization is able to rise above the day-to-day, and there is little risk that an IT strategic planning effort will be perceived as a distraction from providing great service. Take care to address specific weaknesses you have uncovered, but proceed with confidence.

Looking to Improve?

See the next page for ideas about improving your readiness for IT strategic planning and for shaping the planning process to address your needs.

Tool 2: Action Checklist for Improving Readiness

In Areas Self-Test Identifies as Needing Improvement (Subtotal 5 or Less), Consider These Actions:

Leadership Support

- Cultivate an executive sponsor
- Arrange "The Case for IT Strategic Planning" presentation for leaders
- Look for strategically significant quick wins

Institutional Strategic Plan

- Identify alternative sources for strategic guidance (reports, president's speeches, etc.)
- Conduct strategic listening tour
- Extend discovery phase in IT strategic planning process

Partners and Resources

- Secure stakeholder commitments to IT strategic planning process
- Reassign responsibilities to free up IT leadership and key staff time
- Create advisory groups or IT governance body to deepen IT awareness in the community

Data Culture

- Identify and partner with leadership BI advocates
- Deepen relationships with analytics power users (Institutional Research, budget office, faculty researchers)
- Address data quality issues

IT Environment

- Address service reliability issues
- Conclude disruptive/high risk projects
- Develop customer relationships beyond "order taker"/break fix
- Express "one institution" IT ethic

Communication

- Designate responsibility for IT communications
- Recruit students, interns, or contractors to assist
- Promote IT user communications channels

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Choose Planning Time Horizon

Determine the IT Strategic Planning Period that Best Suits Your Institution

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- Guidelines for Choosing IT Strategic Planning Period

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Tool 3: Guidelines for Choosing IT Strategic Planning Period

The time period your IT strategic plan covers has implications for the whole process, affecting actions like how far out to estimate the maturity of emerging technologies, what goals to set, and what kind of data and analysis you require. More fundamentally, it sets bounds on the sort of institutional and organizational changes the plan will consider. Five years is a traditional strategic planning timeframe, but some institutions prefer a shorter period in order to reduce uncertainty and better respond to changing conditions.

Where your institution has already defined a strategic planning timeframe, adopting the same timeframe will usually allow for tighter alignment and greater leverage of work already done at the institutional level.

Shorter: 2-3 Years

- Requires less research and speculation
- Can help IT "catch up" if institution is mid-cycle in its strategic plan
- May not appropriately focus IT staff and campus on necessary long-term changes
- Easier to operationalize
- Must be renewed/replaced sooner

Longer: 4-6 Years

- More speculative, takes longer to develop
- Allows room for longer-term change (e.g., evolving culture, emerging technologies)
- Potentially more impact educating campus about IT strategic contributions
- Harder to operationalize
- Longer shelf life

Simplicity and Accuracy

Preparation for Long-Term Needs

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Choose People and Set Roles

Resources for Organizing and Staffing Your Planning Effort

STEP

3

- IT Strategic Planning People and Roles Fundamentals
- Framework for Organizing IT Strategic Planning Working Group
- IT Strategic Planning Working Group Participant Checklist

IT Strategic Planning People and Roles Fundamentals

A Single Committee Structure Contributes to Gridlock

IT strategic planning is a big, multi-phase job. Even the best teams can get stuck in a quagmire of indecision, and a single committee charged with all aspects of the planning effort can derail the strategic planning process, as it fails to separate day-to-day development of the plan from review and approval. Common problems include:

– Lack of an outside authority for perspective and direction

– Difficulty sustaining time commitment of most senior members

– Tendency to become oversized due to desire for inclusion and committed participation

Perils of a Single Committee Process: Execution and Oversight Are Not Separated

Committee lacks the appropriate level of staff to think strategically about certain issues

Lack of involvement from executives leads to loss of interest

Internal committee dynamics compromise independent assessment of material

Committee deadlocks, disagreeing on what to do next

No arbiter exists to resolve disputes as there is no true leader of the committee

Risk of lost momentum at phase endpoints

Tool 4: Guidelines for Establishing a Bicameral Planning Structure

To ensure progress and objective review, we advise a bicameral planning process: An *IT strategic planning working group* has day-to-day responsibility for developing the plan, while a separate *steering committee* is available to break deadlocks, review drafts, and give leadership approval to the final IT strategic plan. The steering committee (which may simply be the president's cabinet or a subset) is available for advice and direction when the working group needs assistance. This group has a much lighter time commitment than the IT strategic planning working group but needs to be on hand for quick problem resolution.

Bicameral Committee Responsibilities

Steering Committee

Role/Purpose
Direction setting; reviews and approves strategic plan drafts

Seniority
VP to AVP level (across cabinet)

Size
3-5 members

Time Commitment
4-6 hours per month

IT Strategic Planning Working Group

Role/Purpose
Execution; holds workshops, prepares materials, finalizes drafts

Seniority
Director level (possibly with the exception of the CIO)

Size
5–8 members

Time Commitment
10%-20% of time for duration of the project

Tool 5: Framework for Organizing IT Strategic Planning Working Group

Most of the work of developing an IT strategic plan rests with the IT strategic planning working group. It may be chaired by the CIO or a direct report, and typically consists of 5–8 senior IT leaders and invited stakeholders. This working group may receive additional advisory support from IT staff and others. Permanent members of this group should have sustained availability amounting to 10%-20% of their time and no less than half should be from IT.

Selecting Participants and Designating Subcommittees
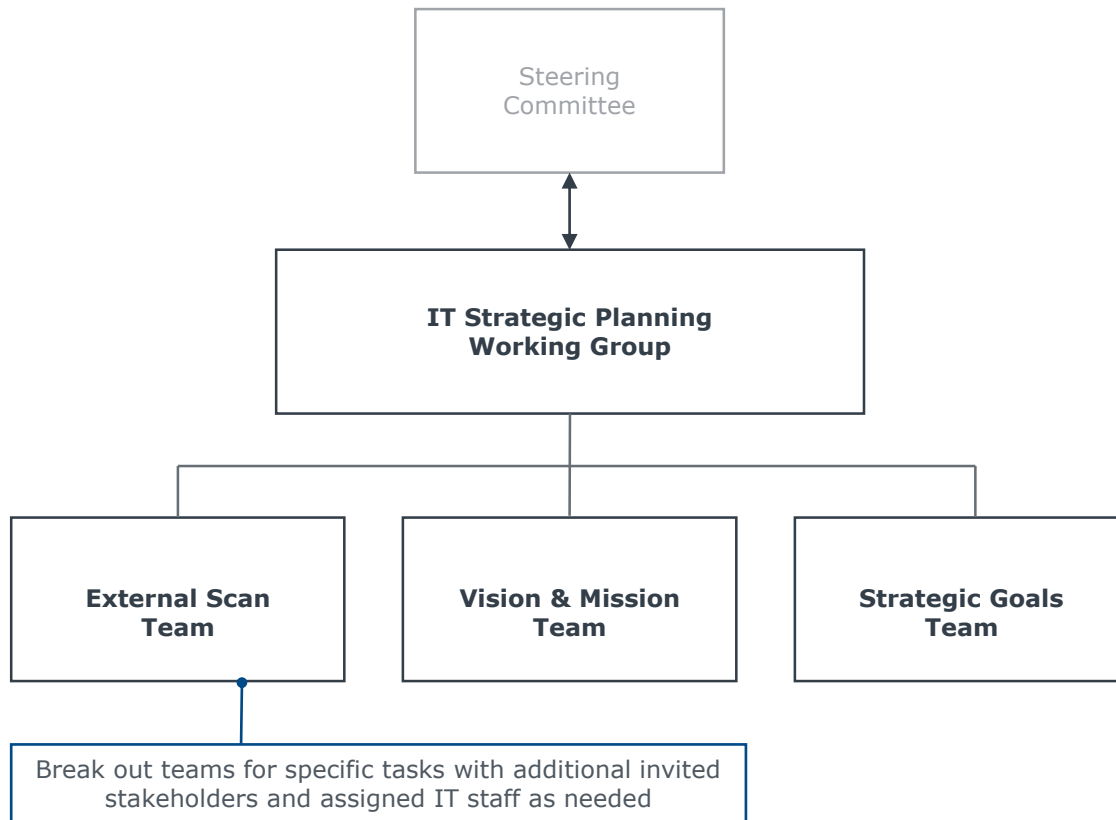
Engaging Leaders Across Campus

Representative Working Group Permanent Members

- Deputy CIO (Chair)
- Directors of Enterprise Systems, Infrastructure, Client Services
- Distributed IT Council Chair
- Associate Vice Provost for Instruction
- Director of Finance, Office of the CFO
- Faculty Senate IT Committee Chair

Tool 6: IT Strategic Planning Working Group Participant Checklist

Potential Partners for IT Strategic Plan Development and Advice. *Identify 5–8 permanent members, at least half from IT, who can make a time commitment of at least 10%. Supplement with advisory members as needed for specific issues or project phases.*

	Title	Permanent Member	Advisory Role
Central IT Leadership	CIO	☐	☐
	Deputy CIO	☐	☐
	Director Enterprise Systems	☐	☐
	Director Client Services	☐	☐
	Director Infrastructure	☐	☐
	Chief Information Security Officer	☐	☐
	Director Academic Technology	☐	☐
	Director Research Computing	☐	☐
	Director IT Communications	☐	☐
	Director IT Human Resources	☐	☐
	Other: _____	☐	☐
	Other: _____	☐	☐
Distributed IT	College IT Director(s)	☐	☐
	Administrative Unit IT Director(s)	☐	☐
	Research Computing IT Director(s)	☐	☐
	Director Instructional Technology	☐	☐
	Other: _____	☐	☐

	Department Representative	Permanent Member	Advisory Role
Key IT Partners	Human Resources	☐	☐
	Finance	☐	☐
	Registrar	☐	☐
	Admissions	☐	☐
	Enrollment Management	☐	☐
	Institutional Research/Institutional Effectiveness	☐	☐
	Academic Affairs	☐	☐
	Center for Teaching and Learning	☐	☐
	Office of VP Research	☐	☐
	Academic Dean(s)	☐	☐
	Student Affairs	☐	☐
	Student Success	☐	☐
Influencers	Faculty Senate	☐	☐
	Student Government	☐	☐
	Library	☐	☐
	Other: _____	☐	☐
	Other: _____	☐	☐

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Plan Project

Guidance for Determining IT Strategic Planning Process and Pace

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- IT Strategic Planning Process Roadmap

Tool 7: IT Strategic Planning Process Roadmap

Focus on Campus Needs and Resources

Understand the major phases and actions involved in the IT strategic planning process (shown below), and consider how your needs can be met by available resources in each phase.

Larger and more complex institutions will involve more stakeholders and allow for longer review cycles, while smaller institutions may be able to do most of the work within the IT team and get quick feedback from a few sources. Absent special circumstances, most institutions should be able to complete an IT strategic plan within four to six months.

Start

Estimated Duration from Project Start

Finish

6 months elapsed time

| 1 month | 3 months | 4 months | 5 months |

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IT Forum

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