



## Align Your Strategic Plan

The chapters in this section provide applications for the concepts, ideas, and research findings presented in previous sections. Each chapter addresses a core development activity and all share the duality of being the most critical for academic leaders to understand, and the most often overlooked, downplayed, or simply disregarded.

When done well, these development activities benefit an academic unit in dollars raised and also by elevating the importance of philanthropy in the eyes of internal and external constituents alike. Harnessing this intangible quality of perception is often what distinguishes high-performing fundraising schools, departments, and other academic units from those that continue to struggle with unmet goals, flat or declining gift volume, and turnover among development staff.

This section's first chapter addresses strategic planning. It is not intended to serve as a comprehensive resource on the process of conducting a strategic plan for an academic unit or an entire college or university. This topic is well-addressed in the scholarly literature, and there are an abundance of experiential perspectives and process models. For the latter, see an insightful four-part series by Perlmutter (2019a, b, c, d) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that looks sequentially at this process through the stages of preparation, management, implementation, and follow through. Similarly, there are extensive resources on strategic

planning specifically for fundraising, including Sargeant and Jay (2014), Seiler (2016), and Lindahl (1992).

This chapter is intended to help academic leaders understand why and how to engage development directly in an academic unit's strategic planning process from the beginning so that philanthropy can meet its full potential and enable the plan's ambitious goals. Conversely, failure is likely when development joins only when the need is urgent and after the plan is finalized. To state the obvious, development strategic planning should follow the priorities established by unit strategic plans; assuring that the two go hand in hand is a sign of a high-performing fundraising program and high functioning collaboration between the academic and development leaders.

### ENGAGING DEVELOPMENT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

Sound planning takes place when existing resources are aligned to the strategic plan, and tactics necessary to execute the plan are feasible within the institution's resources (Goodman & Salem, 2015). This feasibility includes knowing where existing and potential donor support aligns with the plan's major goals. And this is where development can make the greatest contributions to the planning process and needs to be included.

At the institutional level, Ziedenstein (2019) notes development perspectives provide an internal reminder to look outward:

The first role of the chief advancement officer in university strategy development is to ensure that external stakeholders are brought into the process in the appropriate way. External stakeholders, such as key donors and influential alumni, not only provide an off-campus point of view but also will be crucial at some point in funding elements of the planning effort. (p. 30)

While there could be discussion and debate over what is considered the most appropriate way to incorporate external opinions, overall this hardly seems an objectionable statement.

As one looks more deeply, however, this practice is observed far less in strategic planning efforts within schools, departments, and large research centers than at the institutional level. Unit gift officers and development teams are often limited to participating in interviews with external planning consultants or responding to a survey instrument along with other unit staff. While development personnel may be viewed as important

members of the unit, their perceived role as contributors to the academic direction and future is often limited.

This practice is not entirely without merit as most development staff do not hold terminal degrees, nor are they likely to teach, research, or serve on academic committees for promotion and tenure, curriculum, or others requiring faculty expertise. However, they do possess what is among the most important elements of a strategic plan's success. They know their largest donors' interests, values, and motivations for giving. Moreover, gift officers likely know potential donors' interests or they know how to utilize research resources that can provide these insights.

Time is a critical element in the strategic planning processes. Knowledge derived from development expertise is imperative for recognizing when and how a grand plan (and its elements) may become realistic. If additional resources are required to fund the objectives underlying some or all of a plan's goals, it will take time to raise these funds. Involving development from the beginning enables fundraisers to understand the rationale and finer points guiding the inclusion of these goals and objectives. With this information, they can make connections to specific donors and potential donors who possess matching interests. Planning committees that engage development later in the process, or after its conclusion, delay what are already lengthy undertakings with most donors.

Another aspect of time is essential in relation to gift support for a strategic plan. In addition to identifying interest among donors for specific plan aspects, gift officers may also advise caution when there is potentially little or no interest. A hypothetical scenario shows the importance of this insight and input.

A school of arts and sciences is considering a strategic plan goal of expanding graduate degree programs in the physical sciences. Specific objectives would include hiring five new assistant professors and two tenured professors. And another objective is to grow enrollment of graduate students in biology, chemistry, and physics by set amounts for the next five years. The provost will provide initial funding for the new faculty lines because the initiative reflects an institutional priority. A limited amount of funding will be provided for fellowships to recruit graduate students. The draft strategic plan reflects this support and includes a proposed action item to secure additional endowed graduate fellowships from alumni and others.

Data on the school's history of gifts for graduate fellowships, whether anemic or robust, and assessment of future donor potential in this area

should be provided to the planning committee as this goal and action item are being explored. Bypassing this step and simply including this item within the strategic plan will not ensure a windfall in endowed graduate fellowships. Careful consideration must be given in all situations where philanthropic funding is necessary for specific purposes. By using development data and consulting with fundraising staff, planning committee leaders also empower development with the most time to match donor interests with institutional needs and to begin the process from a place of collaboration.

This kind of dedicated attention is also necessary in academic units that lack development officers. Development staff from the central office or foundation should be invited to be active participants in the strategic planning. Even with limited experience working with the unit's donors, such staff can leverage their development research resources to collect historical data and investigate potential sources of major gifts as elements of the plan emerge.

### ALIGNMENT EXERCISE: MATCHING DONOR INTERESTS AND STRATEGIC NEEDS

Among the greatest benefits of a fundamentally sound development program is the utility of applying core fundraising activities to new situations and needs as they arise. This includes those goals that result from strategic planning, as illustrated by an alignment exercise described here.

Referring first back to the donor management matrix in Chapter 8, leaders of academic units should have current knowledge of, and engagement with, their top donors and potential donors. These are the entities in the 1A box of the matrix. In addition, each individual or organization should have an engagement strategy with specific actions planned leading toward near-term gift discussions. If this approach is being followed, these matrices can be considerable assets in strategic planning processes.

The exercise illustrated in Fig. 11.1 uses a hypothetical academic school to explore development readiness as it is approaching a strategic planning process. Most leaders of academic units can identify their key priorities, many of which will ultimately become the core of a strategic plan. In this exercise, these priorities are reflected in the middle row in response to the statement, "In three years, the school will..."

The school's five largest existing donors are identified in the row above the leader's priorities. These would be considered 1A donors in the matrix

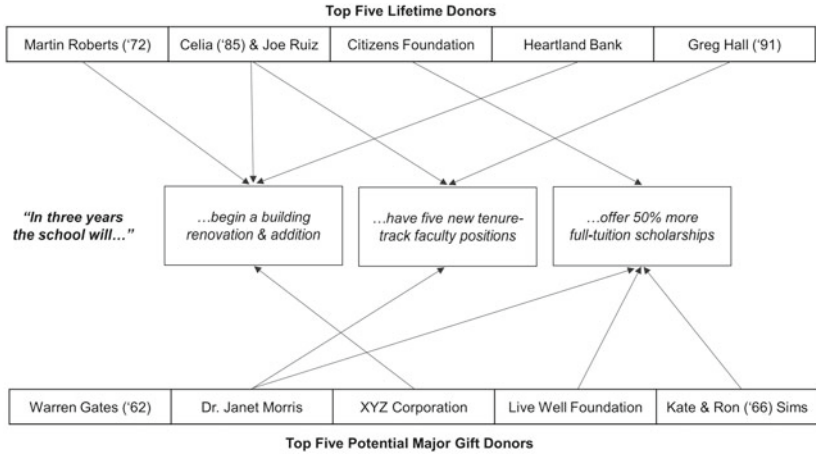


Fig. 11.1 Strategic planning development readiness exercise

since they have the greatest financial capacity and affinity and established relationships with the school. The top five potential major gift donors are in the bottom row. These may include past donors who it is believed have not yet given to their likely capacity. These may also include potential donors who are being cultivated but are not yet ready to give. Many of these also come from 1A in the matrix, but may also be 2A or 1B.

The value of this exercise for strategic planning rests in drawing lines from the top and bottom rows to the priorities that align with each donors' specific interests and values. Some may have multiple interests as demonstrated through past gifts or through philanthropic or other conversations (that were dutifully recorded in the database for use in future situations like this one). In some cases, the interests of a potential donor may be unknown, as illustrated by the one name in the bottom row with no connecting lines.

This illustration can be modified to include more names in rows, as well as additional strategic priorities. It can also be used during the actual strategic planning process to explore emerging goals' viability from a philanthropic perspective. Using this tool effectively is contingent on many of the development functions and processes noted throughout the earlier chapters. If this exercise proves ineffective, it is likely an indicator that

more relationship building with external constituents is needed—specifically with the very same individuals and organizations whose support is needed to enable the strategic plan’s success. If the chart is empty of donors or potential donors or the priorities and donors do not connect, challenges are ahead. Funds for the plan could still be raised from other donors. However, if they lack the highest gift capacity or affinity, these will likely be smaller gifts. Consequently, the process will require more time to raise more gifts from more donors. Or, if the donors are not represented because they are not yet known to the development team, more time than allocated will also likely be required.

## CONCLUSION

Despite criticism and questions of the value of strategic planning (Eckel & Trower, 2019; Ginsberg, 2011), this traditional visioning tool will continue to be utilized by colleges and universities, and the major academic units within them. These exercises require considerable investments of energy and attention from a broad range of participants. While the end result may represent the collective vision and aspiration of the unit or institution, a plan without resources behind it is equivalent to a wish list.

Successful plans have demonstrated that the goal-setting process must be tied to reliable budget resources (Fain, 2007). Excluding or limiting the participation of development misses vital opportunities for securing new or supplemental resources for the plan’s goals and objectives. The case study in this section provides an example of an academic unit in a major public research university that embraced this approach. By engaging development staff and also an advisory board and key donors in a totally new way, the resultant plan successfully matched the leader’s vision with the philanthropic resources, from the start. The plan ultimately inspired gifts that enabled the school to pursue the objectives necessary for achieving its ambitious goals.

## ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

1. Before embarking on a new strategic plan, have candid conversations with some of your top donors. Ask them how important it is for them to know that an organization has a strategic plan before they

- choose to make a gift. Ask if they have ever read a strategic plan from your college or university, or any other organization they support.
2. If you have a development officer for your unit, quiz them on core information they should know. This would include data about enrollment, graduation rates by degree and major, research expenditures, and your physical space including facilities' total square feet and composition of instructional and research space. To be positive contributors in your strategic planning process, they must have the same grasp of this baseline information as the academic leadership team since some (or possibly all) of these measures may relate to plan priorities.

#### SECTION IV CASE STUDY: A STRATEGIC PLAN INFORMED AND INSPIRED BY PHILANTHROPY

Kansas State University (KSU) announced in May 2019 a \$20 million gift designated for the College of Business Administration (CBA) to advance its strategic plan (Kansas State University Foundation, 2019). Looking behind the headline reveals a story most academic leaders wish they could tell about a strategic plan that inspired gifts like this one. While the donor had a lengthy giving history, including a \$5 million gift a decade earlier to endow the deanship (Kansas State University Foundation, n.d.), the real story is how CBA intentionally took what many view as a staid academic tradition and used it to engage those with the capacity to fund transformational goals.

The process in this case began as many do, with the appointment of a new dean. CBA's marketing department chair of 10 years was named interim dean in 2015 and permanently appointed the following year. An outside planning consultant was hired and began conducting internal interviews with all CBA faculty and staff in early 2017.

These interviews also included several executive committee members of the Dean's Business Advisory Council. The full council totals more than 60 members, with 12–14 typically appointed to the executive committee (Kansas State University, n.d.a).

CBA had previously conducted strategic planning, but the goal in this case quickly emerged to create a plan like they never had before (Gwinner, 2020). The Strategic Planning Leadership Team, a group comprising the dean and associate deans, department heads, initiative leaders, and

a faculty senate representative, committed early on to creating a plan that would serve as a living document. The mission, vision, and core values would remain relatively stable, but the goals would be under constant review and revision.

The advisory council embraced the concept of a plan that would be brief but focused, and identify not just goals to advance the college, but specific tactics for achieving them. As a reflection of their collective business experience, they proposed including timelines for the tactics to hold key groups and individuals accountable for progress. The leadership team agreed; everyone considered accountability essential to achieve the plan and prevent it from being quickly forgotten.

The final plan was presented to the full advisory board in fall 2017 and adopted by the college later that year. The plan retained the sought-after brevity, with just three focus areas; reinventing student experiences, expanding external collaborations, and strengthening foundations for enterprise sustainability and growth (Kansas State University, n.d.b).

It was no coincidence that many of the goals underlying these focus areas align with the interests and beliefs of CBA's top donors. But rather than a case of the tail of philanthropy wagging the academic dog, many of these goals would have been included regardless. CBA benefitted by actively engaging these donors in the planning process and enabling them to see first-hand each goal's importance. They did this rather than waiting until after the plan's completion to introduce its already-established goals by way of seeking gifts to accomplish them.

In particular, the seeds for the \$20 million gift in 2019 were planted before the initial interviews in early 2017 and continued through the executive committee meetings and ongoing individual conversations with the donor (Willems, 2020). Everything started with an open exchange of ideas, and CBA never "pitched" specific projects for the donor to consider that could just be incorporated into the plan. The result was elements in the plan that both the college needed and the donor believed in.

For example, part of the gift is designated to fund a new Center for Financial Analysis, which reflects the donor's advocacy for data-driven analysis and decision-making in business. As a Midwestern public business school, CBA also wanted elements of the plan to help build its brand. The donor shared the same belief, so another part of the gift is designated to fund the creation of a strategic marketing director position. This would be a first for CBA as the college's marketing activity was limited mainly



to providing internal support, such as websites, admissions collateral, and similar administrative needs.

Another objective to be funded by the \$20 million gift is a new digital learning repository. This resource will include recordings of multi-course programming for wider distribution to full-time students and continuing and executive education classmates. Content will also be made available to alumni, targeted industry segments, and the business community in Kansas and beyond.

Others who were engaged in the planning process from the beginning were also inspired to give to the priorities. Another alumnus serving on the executive committee committed \$500,000 in matching funds for new endowed scholarships. These support students in accounting, the donor's major. But the scholarships also target out-of-state students to address the strategic plan's objective for building a stronger image and brand to enhance CBA's ability to recruit top students from anywhere. Within 18 months, the full \$500,000 had been applied in matches to 15 endowed scholarships established by other donors.

It should also be noted that 2016 marked not only the new dean's appointment, but also the completion of the college's new 160,000 square-foot facility. Initiating a strategic plan shortly after these events was prescient in helping to realize the largest gifts of numerous longtime CBA supporters. Engaging them in the planning process, rather than soliciting them after it was over, helped create a strategic plan that is doing far more than simply sitting on a shelf until it is time for the next one.

### Key Lessons

- **Dream big and let others help you dream:** The dean may set the vision for a school, but it should be a collective vision informed by many voices. Use the strategic plan to empower others to share their perspective of what the school can become.
- **A plan is just a wish list unless there is financial support behind it:** Everyone acknowledged that the final plan had to identify credible sources of support for those goals that required resources beyond CBA's budget.
- **Engage alumni early and often:** Consistent involvement created true ownership among the alumni who participated in the planning process. They brought valuable industry insight and ideas, and

it inspired many to provide financial backing to activate the plan components that resonated most with them.

## REFERENCES

- Eckel, P., & Trower, C. (2019, February 14). Stop planning. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved July 31, 2020, from <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/02/14/colleges-need-rethink-strategic-planning-opinion>.
- Fain, P. (2007, October 5). Vision for excellence. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved July 31, 2020, from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/vision-for-excellence/>.
- Ginsberg, B. (2011, July 17). The strategic plan: Neither strategy nor plan, but a waste of time. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved July 31, 2020, from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-strategic-plan-neither-strategy-nor-plan-but-a-waste-of-time/>.
- Goodman, C. A., & Salem, H. (2015). *Getting the most out of university strategic planning*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE157.html>.
- Gwinner, K. (2020, June 30). Edgerly Family Dean, KSU College of Business Administration (A. Conley, Interviewer).
- Kansas State University. (n.d.a). *Dean's Business Advisory Council*. Retrieved July 28, 2020, from College of Business Administration. <https://cba.k-state.edu/alumni-partners/advisory-councils/business/>.
- Kansas State University. (n.d.b). *Strategic plan 2018–2022*. Retrieved July 28, 2020, from College of Business Administration. <https://cba.k-state.edu/about/strategic-plan.html>.
- Kansas State University Foundation. (n.d.). *Massachusetts couple establishes first endowed deanship at k-state*. Retrieved July 28, 2020, from <https://www.ksu.foundation.org/why-i-give/2011/edgerley.html>.
- Kansas State University Foundation. (2019, May 3). *Transformational gift advances college strategic plan*. Retrieved July 28, 2020, from Innovation & Inspiration: The \$1.4 Billion Campaign for K-State. <https://inspire.k-state.edu/your-support-in-action/campaign-news/EdgerleyCBA2019.html>.
- Lindahl, W. E. (1992). *Strategic planning for fund raising*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Perlmutter, D. D. (2019a, September 18). Admin 101: How to manage the strategic planning process. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Admin-101-How-to-Manage-the/247126>.

- Perlmutter, D. D. (2019b, August 6). Admin 101: How to plan for strategic planning. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Admin-101-How-to-Plan-for/246796>.
- Perlmutter, D. D. (2019c, November 25). Admin 101: How to properly wrap up a strategic plan (and why that matters). *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Admin-101-How-to-Properly/247572>.
- Perlmutter, D. D. (2019d, October 22). Admin 101: Tips on carrying out your strategic plan. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Admin-101-Tips-on-Carrying/247365>.
- Sargeant, A., & Jay, E. (2014). *Fundraising management: Analysis, planning and practice* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Seiler, T. L. (2016). Plan to succeed. In E. R. Tempel, T. L. Seiler, & D. F. Burlingame (Eds.), *Achieving excellence in fundraising* (4th ed., pp. 27–35). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Willems, G. (2020, June 23). President & CEO, KSU Foundation (A. Conley, Interviewer).
- Ziedenstein, D. (2019). Strategy as the foundation for advancement. In M. J. Worth & M. T. Lambert (Eds.), *Advancing higher education: New strategies for fundraising, philanthropy, and engagement* (pp. 25–33). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.