

Strategic Plan Toolkit

Developed by Lindsay Miller Consulting for
the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison



How to use this document

This document consists of two types of pages:

1. **Instructional pages** like this one with a grey bar along the left margin explain how to use the toolkit, provide guidance about how to conduct a strategic planning process, and describe how the output of your process might look.
2. **Worksheet pages** provide space to write. The worksheet pages have page numbers in the bottom corner that correspond to the document's pre-formatted table of contents. You can type your responses into the spaces provided in the PDF worksheet pages. When the PDF is completed electronically, you will have the option to save/print your completed plan (eliminating the instructional pages).

If you prefer, you can print this document and write on the worksheet pages by hand to begin formulating your thoughts. Or, you might choose to type your work into a separate Word or Google Doc so that you have more space and flexibility to format your final strategic plan document.

IMPORTANT: If you choose to complete the worksheet pages in PDF format, begin by saving a copy of this document (File > Save As) and name it something unique to your organization. Also be sure to save your work occasionally as you go. (File > Save)

On the next page you will start by filling in your organization's name (and logo if you have one).

Strategic Plan

Getting Started

The purpose of a strategic plan is to outline your organization's main priorities and implementation intentions over a period of time (usually 3 - 5 years). A strategic plan can help your organization articulate the reasons for doing its work, the impact it seeks to have as a result, the programmatic strategies that will best achieve that impact, and the organizational capacity and resources required to support the work. A strategic plan should be thought of as a living document—a road map to guide your program toward an aspirational destination -- and not as a static document that will never change.

As with any journey, you may encounter roadblocks that will require you to pause, find new ways forward, or even change your destination altogether. A good strategic plan should be referenced frequently, and updated as needed. As well, your strategic plan should help you measure progress towards your organizational goals and hold your organization and its leaders accountable for implementation of the plan. While your strategic plan is primarily an internal document, it can be a useful tool to share with partners, funders and other stakeholders to help communicate where your program is headed and how it will get there. Many organizations choose to create a public-facing version of their strategic plan, which can align with your communication goals to articulate the future vision of your program in a way that is compelling and engaging.

The Strategic Planning Process

It's important to note that strategy development is as much about the process (and associated learning) as it is about the end product or plan. Strategy development requires assessing your organization's current strengths, assets, challenges and growth points, and being honest about each. As well, there are external factors at play that may influence your organization's ability to achieve impact, which must be identified and considered. You'll want to research what works and what doesn't, learn from other programs that may have similar aspirations for impact, and connect with stakeholders, students and partners to understand what areas of work should be of highest priority to your organization.

Good strategy development can take months of collaborative and iterative thinking and learning to determine the "right" areas in which to focus. If your organization has the resources to do so, it's highly recommended that you hire an outside strategy consultant to support your thinking and process. If you don't have the resources to hire outside expertise, consider identifying a sub-committee or "Strategy Team" comprised of board members, staff, students, partners, etc. who are excited about the idea of engaging in process-oriented conversations about the work of the program, and are committed to collaborating over a period of time (usually 6-8 months) to develop a strategic plan. This group would be tasked with creating a work plan, leadership structure (if needed), and fundraising goals to help your organization or program achieve its near- and long-term goals.

For a description of the Alliance's strategic planning process leading up to its launch, refer to the [Alliance's Strategic Plan \(https://www.higheredinprison.org/guiding-documents\)](https://www.higheredinprison.org/guiding-documents).

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Executive Summary

(or Letter from the Executive Director/Board)

The first section of your strategic plan should be an overview or summary of the plan itself. This can take the form of a letter from the Board or Executive Director, or an Executive Summary.

This is typically the last part of the plan that you write, after the other components of the strategic plan are finalized.

If possible, keep your summary to a single page and provide a high-level overview of the plan's context and content, and its implications for the future of your organization.

Before you start, think about your audience (i.e. funders, board members, volunteers and other stakeholders)? Keep them in mind when writing.

- ▶ Introduce yourself: What is your organization and what does it do?
- ▶ Who do you serve?
- ▶ What is your organization's big goal? (this is your vision)
- ▶ What's the need? (what is the problem/problems you are solving?)
- ▶ What are the key takeaways/findings from work completed to date (what impact have you already had, how are you building on that momentum)?
- ▶ What is your approach and interim goals in the timeline of this current strategic plan?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Part I: About [Organization]

Organizational Overview

Provide a concise description of your organization or program, including **what** you do, **where** you do it, **who** you serve, etc. You may want to include information about your major programs or initiatives, funding structures, or other details that will help provide context relevant to the strategic plan. Creating subsections (e.g., What We Do, Our Work, Our Approach, etc) will be helpful in clearly articulating your purpose and making this information accessible for readers. This section should be long enough to give the reader a clear sense of the organization's current structure and context, but should not be more than 2-3 pages long.

Organizational History [Optional]

If the program's history or evolution is an important component to your work, describe it here. For example, did your program emerge from the support of a significant partner(s) (e.g., in coordination with a group of people who are currently incarcerated), an important event or location, or any other "origin story" that is significant in understanding why the organization exists and does the work it does. If so, this will help add context to the story of "who you are" as an organization. If not, feel free to remove this section.

PART I: ABOUT

Organizational Overview



Organizational History



Mission, Vision and Values

Use this section to articulate the program’s mission, vision and values. If your organization has statements related to its beliefs or mandates, include them here. This section is designed to communicate what your program is all about, and why you do the work you do. Make sure each of these statements (mission, vision and values) follow a similar pattern: they are concise and clear statements related to your program.

Mission

An effective mission statement should be a clear description **what** your organization does, **whom** it serves, and the **impact** it aims to have. The mission statement should explain how your organization is different from other entities (i.e. should make a compelling case for the need it fills). Try to express your mission statement in one clear and concise sentence.

The Alliance’s Mission:

We support the expansion of quality higher education in prison, empower students while in prison and after release, and shape public discussion about education and incarceration.

Vision

An effective vision statement is a clear description of what your organization aspires to be. Spend time discussing the ideal world you want to create. Ask participants in this discussion to think about the world they hope to create 5 or 10 years from now. You could also spend time talking about what success looks like for your program/organization and how you might articulate that vision in a single statement. Try to express your vision statement in one clear and concise sentence.

The Alliance’s Vision:

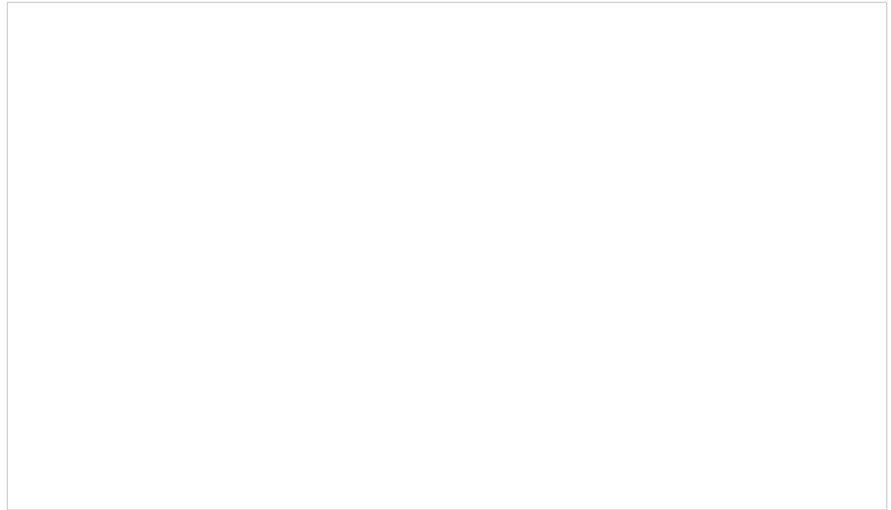
We envision a world in which all people, including those in prison, have access to quality higher education, creating a more just and equitable world.

Additional Examples:

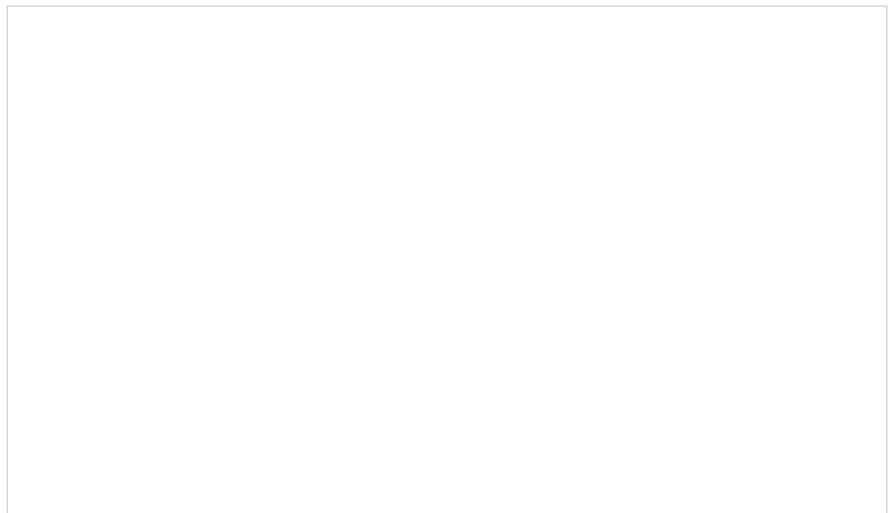
MISSION STATEMENT	VISION STATEMENT	ORG.
To feed America’s hungry through a nationwide network of member food banks and engage our country in the fight to end hunger.	A hunger-free America	<i>Feeding America</i>
Seeking to put God’s love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities and hope.	A world where everyone has a decent place to live.	<i>Habitat for Humanity</i>
Creative Commons develops, supports, and stewards legal and technical infrastructure that maximizes digital creativity, sharing, and innovation.	Nothing less than realizing the full potential of the Internet—universal access to research and education, full participation in culture—to drive a new era of development, growth, and productivity.	<i>Creative Commons</i>

Mission and Vision

Our Mission



Our Vision



TIP: As you create other documents for your organization (i.e. communication plan, strategic plan, and/or fundraising plan), check back with your stated mission, vision and values and ensure that they are expressed in these documents, too and that they still feel relevant and useful for the organization. There is no rule against going back and adjusting or rewriting your mission, vision and values statement after trying to put them into practice.

Values

Your values support your mission and vision. Work with your stakeholder community to identify 5-7 values and then in a sentence describe what each value means to your work. Your organizational values should be easily understood by all stakeholders and community members. Once you have narrowed your values down to 5-7, write one statement about each value. As you start to list value statements, ask yourselves:

- ▶ What does this value mean to us?
- ▶ What does it look like in practice?
- ▶ Is it possible to put this value into practice?
- ▶ What does this value community to our stakeholder community? And, is this a message we want to convey?
- ▶ How will we evaluate if we are living up to this value?

Try to choose words/phrases that are not complicated and require extended elaboration.

The Alliance's Values and Values Statements:

Human Dignity

We believe in the unequivocal value of every person and their right to be treated equitably, without labels or stigmas.

Equitable Access to Education

We believe that all people should have access to the opportunities afforded by higher education, including those incarcerated.

Resolve

We believe in maintaining an unwavering commitment to our goals.

Collaboration

We believe in bringing together multiple groups to work and share resources for the purpose of rebuilding communities, one generation at a time, through higher education.

Transparency

We believe in the critical importance of access to reliable information and the insurance of accountability from and to all our members.

Example Values:

Accountability
Care
Collaboration
Commitment
Community
Compassion
Consistency
Courage
Creativity
Dependability
Discipline
Education
Efficiency
Empowerment
Equity
Equitable Access
Excellence
Honesty
Human Dignity
Innovation
Integrity
Loyalty
Motivation
Open-mindedness
Optimism
Passion
Perseverance
Performance
Positivity
Resolve
Respect
Reliability
Service to others
Transparency
Trust

Our Values

1

2

3

4

5

Impact

It's important to be able to clearly articulate the impact you seek to have in the world as a result of your work. While it's good to have big and lofty aspirations, those aspirations should be described in your vision rather than in your organizational strategy. Here, clearly and concisely define the impact that your organization will have, and will hold itself accountable for achieving. This could be a specific number of courses offered or degrees granted, a specific number of students served, or an increase in individuals who consider "student" as central to their identity as a result of your program. Your program's impact might include influencing policy or supporting other programs by sharing what you know. It's ok to identify multiple intended impacts, but they should be attainable, and should align with and advance your organization's mission, vision and values.

The Alliance's Impact Statement:

Our goal is to build the field of higher education in prison by working to define the practices and theories that constitute high-quality teaching and learning in prison and articulating the meaningful metrics meaningful metrics, quality standards, and indicators that should guide programming and the broader development of the field.

Theory of Change

Your Theory of Change should articulate cause and effect relationships between your activities and programs, and the impact(s) your organization seeks to have. Your Theory of Change can be a short written statement describing the connection between your work, its outputs and the eventual outcomes that will be achieved. You might also consider using a graphic illustration to describe the relationship between your work and the resulting outputs and impact.

The Alliance's Theory of Change:

Access to meaningful, sustained, quality higher education has the potential to transform the lives of people incarcerated, their families, the communities to which they return, and society as a whole.

Impact



Theory of Change



Part II: Strategic Planning Process

Here, describe the process you used to develop your strategic plan (see the note related to strategic planning processes at the beginning of this Toolkit). Who was involved in developing your new strategy? What activities, engagements or outreach did they participate in? What individuals or groups were consulted through this process? What was the timeline of the process?

PART II: STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS



Part III: Strategic Priorities

Here, describe the key areas of work that will lead the organization to the intended impact. It's recommended that you identify no more than five strategic priorities to keep your plan manageable and impactful.

For the Alliance, these were:

1. Building Community
2. Producing Knowledge
3. Supporting Quality Practice
4. Shaping Dialogue
5. Ensuring Sustainability

You may want to include a graphic overview of how these priorities relate to one another and/or how they fit within the organization's structure. You may have priority areas that involve partnership with other entities, or that require the development of new program areas all together. The purpose here is to describe (at a high level) what exactly you will focus on in the coming years to achieve your intended impact.

Under each priority area, you will go on to identify a set of strategies, milestones, timeline, and owner. This is where you will really dig into the “how”, “when” and “who” of each key area of work.

For a full example of the relationship between a strategic priority and the strategy and milestones that comprise the efforts to achieve the priority, you can reference the [Alliance's Strategic Plan \(https://www.higheredinprison.org/guiding-documents\)](https://www.higheredinprison.org/guiding-documents).

PART III: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1

2

3

4

5

Priority 1: []

RATIONALE & DESCRIPTION

Here, describe the strategic priority area, why it's important to your organization's Theory of Change and how it will lead to your intended impact. Describe general approaches that you might employ in this area of work (such as leveraging partnerships, focusing on messaging or codifying practices). For each priority area, determine a realistic number of major strategies that you will employ to move towards your intended impact. This could be new initiatives or programs, major shifts in ways of working, new partnerships or efforts to track data and outcomes.

Strategy 1.1 - Describe the first major strategy in this priority area

Think of these strategies as the major pieces of work you will undertake to move you towards your intended impact. As such, you shouldn't have more than two to three major strategies per priority area. It may be helpful to look holistically at your priority areas and strategies in each area (i.e., is this a realistic vision for your work in the coming years?) Do you have the human and financial capacity to operationalize this work? If not, how will you prioritize and/or scale back?

Next, use the table to identify key milestones as you implement the strategy. What are the important tasks or objectives that you'll need to accomplish? How will you sequence these, and when should they realistically be completed? Who will be responsible for making sure they happen? If multiple people are involved, make sure you identify a project/milestone leader (i.e., highlight or underline the project leader).

Using this framework, build out your plan by identifying major strategies and related milestones that will lead you to your intended impact within the timeframe of your strategic plan. If you need space or tables for additional strategies, go ahead and add them.

Priority 1:

RATIONALE AND DESCRIPTION

Strategy 1.1:

MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
1.1.1		
1.1.2		
1.1.3		
1.1.4		
1.1.5		
1.1.6		
1.1.7		

Strategy 1.2:

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MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
1.2.1		
1.2.2		
1.2.3		
1.2.4		
1.2.5		
1.2.6		
1.2.7		

Priority 2:

RATIONALE AND DESCRIPTION

Strategy 2.1:

MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
2.1.1		
2.1.2		
2.1.3		
2.1.4		
2.1.5		
2.1.6		
2.1.7		

Strategy 2.2:

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MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
2.2.1		
2.2.2		
2.2.3		
2.2.4		
2.2.5		
2.2.6		
2.2.7		

Priority 3:

RATIONALE AND DESCRIPTION

Strategy 3.1:

MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
3.1.1		
3.1.2		
3.1.3		
3.1.4		
3.1.5		
3.1.6		
3.1.7		

Strategy 3.2:

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MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
3.2.1		
3.2.2		
3.2.3		
3.2.4		
3.2.5		
3.2.6		
3.2.7		

Priority 4:

RATIONALE AND DESCRIPTION

Strategy 4.1:

MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
4.1.1		
4.1.2		
4.1.3		
4.1.4		
4.1.5		
4.1.6		
4.1.7		

Strategy 4.2:

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MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
4.2.1		
4.2.2		
4.2.3		
4.2.4		
4.2.5		
4.2.6		
4.2.7		

Priority 5:

RATIONALE AND DESCRIPTION

Strategy 5.1:

MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
5.1.1		
5.1.2		
5.1.3		
5.1.4		
5.1.5		
5.1.6		
5.1.7		

Strategy 5.2:

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MILESTONE	TIMEFRAME	OWNER
5.2.1		
5.2.2		
5.2.3		
5.2.4		
5.2.5		
5.2.6		
5.2.7		
5.2.8		
5.2.9		
5.2.10		
5.2.11		

Part IV: Approach to Strategy Implementation

It can be useful to identify approaches, or guiding principles, to support the implementation of your strategic plan. It's important to engage in this process because much of your work likely requires and is guided by partnerships and you want to make sure everyone you are working with to understand how their work fits with your mission, vision and values. Perhaps you will rely more heavily on partnerships to achieve the work you've laid out here? It also might be helpful to state other underlying themes to your work (such as how you communicate about your work, how you measure impact, how you use data, etc.). For example, student voice and engagement might be a cross-cutting principle that will support all of the priority areas you've identified. If this makes sense within the context of the strategic plan you've created, add those thoughts here. If not, feel free to delete this section.

PART IV: APPROACH TO STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION





Call to Action

Consider closing your strategic plan with an invitation to join your movement, support your work or donate to your program. You may also want to acknowledge individuals who supported the development of your plan, and/or direct readers to your organization's website or social media pages.

CALL TO ACTION





If you have completed the worksheet pages in PDF format, you can now use the button below to delete the instructional pages.

IMPORTANT: Be sure to save a copy first so you can go back to your answers with the instructional pages included if you'd like to revisit this work at a later time. (File > Save As...)