Develop Strategies

### Prerequisites
- Best Practice in Community College Budgeting, 2A — Develop Goals to Guide the Budgeting and Planning Process
- Best Practice in Community College Budgeting, 2B — Identify the Gaps between the Goals and Current State and Determine the Root Causes of those Gaps
- Best Practice in Community College Budgeting, 3A — Research Proven Strategies and Practices

### Key Points
- Based on its research into proven strategies and practices, a college needs to articulate its own institutional priorities. An institutional priority is an overall approach for overcoming the problems identified by a college’s diagnosis of root causes. This best practice recommends that an institutional priority be clear, though not overly specific, about how it will improve student achievement and describe the assumed mechanism by which it will affect the college’s performance. A college needs focus in how it will meet student achievement goals, thus it should focus on a limited number of institutional priorities.

- An action plan describes the steps to implement the institutional priorities as well as explains how resources will be used to implement the strategies. This best practice recommends that a college’s action plan contain the following: goals for the college as well as its subunits, performance measures to determine if goals are being achieved, specific action steps to implement the action plan, guidance on personnel and other resources, and analysis on long-term financial sustainability (e.g., three-year estimates on revenue and expenditures).

- With the institutional priorities and action plan in place, a college has defined a set of strategies that should be formally adopted. To formalize the strategies, a college should garner support from the highest levels of the organization; ensure that the set of strategies are well-crafted as it becomes an agreement among stakeholders on what defines success in the college and how to achieve it; and provide advance notice to stakeholders should the strategies call for changes to existing strategies and practices.

### Related Award Program Criteria
- **Criterion 3.B.1: Action Plan (Mandatory).** The applicant has developed an action plan that provides a coherent presentation of how the applicant will implement its action plan. An

(continued)
I. Developing Institutional Priorities

Background. Based on its research into proven strategies and practices, a college needs to articulate its own institutional priorities that will direct action planning and budget allocations. An institutional priority is an overall approach for overcoming the problems identified by a college’s diagnosis of root causes. An institutional priority provides direction without specifying exactly the action steps to be taken. The reader should note that the term institutional priority is used in this document to describe a general concept. There are various specific methods of developing an institutional priority, each of which has its own names for the product produced. A college should use the method and name that suits its circumstances.

Introduction

A college should develop and adopt a set of strategies to achieve its goals for student performance. These strategies should be based on a solid grounding of strategies and practices that have been shown to be effective for promoting student achievement in community colleges.

A strategy consists of three essential elements. The first is a diagnosis that explains the nature of the challenge that the college faces in achieving its goals. A diagnosis of the root causes of the gap between the college’s goal state and current level of performance (see Best Practice in Community College Budgeting, 2B — Identify the Gaps between the Goals and Current State and Determine the Root Causes of those Gaps) serves to identify critical aspects of the situation. The second is an institutional priority, which is an overall approach for overcoming the problems highlighted by a college’s diagnosis of root causes. Third is an action plan to implement the institutional priority. A strategy without the implementation steps is no strategy at all.

This best practice addresses the following:

I. Developing institutional priorities.
II. Developing an action plan.
III. Formally adopting a set of strategies. With the institutional priorities in place and an action plan set, a college will have a set of strategies. The strategies should be formally adopted.

• Criterion 3.B.2: Accepted by Administration. The action plan is formally adopted or accepted by college administration and/or the governing board, as described in the application.
**Recommendation.** A college should develop institutional priorities with the following key characteristics — using the format or approach to development that best suites its particular circumstances:

- **Clarity of intent.** Each institutional priority that the college develops should be clear about how it will optimize student achievement. To illustrate, a priority “to support professional development” is too vague to provide meaningful guidance, but a priority “to support professional development for the contextualization of remedial/developmental courses” clearly articulates how professional development is intended to help the college meet student performance goals.

- **Implementation details are not overly specific.** Absent implementation details, decision makers are able to more easily consider the bigger picture about how multiple institutional priorities might fit together or conflict. Further, the process is not likely to become bogged down over minor disagreements about implementation details. Also, maintaining a level of abstraction in the priority invites others to more readily take some piece of ownership in the priority (compared to a priority where all of the details appear to have been decided).

- **Articulates presumed cause-and-effect relationships.** The institutional priority should describe the assumed mechanism by which it will alter the performance of the college. A shared, explicit understanding of the assumed cause-and-effect relationship at work forms a powerful foundation for budgeting because it becomes the basis for deciding which uses of the college’s limited funds have the most potential. To illustrate, a college might develop an institutional priority to create a strong first-year experience program for students, under the assumption that the program will lead students to have better relations with faculty, better time management skills, and greater awareness of support resources. All of these effects can be verified and should reasonably lead to better learning and achievement outcomes for the students.

- **Limited in number.** A college needs focus in how it will meet student achievement goals. Too many institutional priorities will dilute the effort.

**II. Developing an Action Plan**

**Background.** An action plan describes the actions and resources needed to put the college’s institutional priorities into practice. An action plan is essential to the budgeting process because it describes more precisely where resources are needed to successfully implement the college’s strategies.

**Recommendation.** An action plan should contain at least the following elements:

- **Goals for the college as a whole and for its subunits.** The Best Practice in Community College Budgeting, 2A – Develop Goals to Guide the Budgeting and Planning Process describes the goal setting process. The goals should be documented in the action plan.

- **Sources of evidence that will be used to determine if the goals are being achieved.** A college should be able to articulate the performance implications of the action plan, such as student outcome goals and other measures and indicators of success (e.g., student retention, student achievement of interim milestones, etc.).

- **Actions that are intended to achieve the goals.** The action plan describes the specific actions the college will take to implement the institutional priorities. The actions should form a coherent, coordinated approach to implementing the action plan.

- **Guidance on personnel counts and other critical resourcing assumptions.** The action plan should describe resourcing assumptions that are thought to be critical to the college’s strategies because these assumptions will have an important impact on the budgeting process. Examples of such assumptions that should be described in the action plan include:
  - **Number of staff, including full-time and part-time.** There are different budgetary cost implications for full-time staff and part-time staff, especially at the faculty level. In addition, management implications (such as capacity for workload) will vary.
  - **Availability of advisors.** Will students be advised by dedicated advisors? Or will faculty be expected to include advising in their duties?
  - **Workload expectations.** To what extent are faculty expected to assume non-teaching duties, such as administration?
• **Facility capacity.** Does the college have the physical infrastructure for its offerings to meet student demand?

• **Analysis of financial sustainability.** The action plan should present an analysis of its financial sustainability beyond a single year. For example, it might present three-year cost estimates as well as the revenues that are intended to fund the action plan.

An action plan should include all of the college’s available resources. For example, the action plan should cover the role of each college subunit in carrying out the institutional priorities. The action plan should also include 100 percent of the college’s financial resources (e.g., general, discretionary funds as well as special funds).

**III. Formally Adopting a Set of Strategies**

**Background.** With the institutional priorities and action plan in place, a college has defined a set of strategies. These strategies should be formally adopted. A college can use any number of formats to articulate its strategies, including adopting them as a formal “strategic plan.”

**Recommendation.** The formalization of the strategies should observe the following guidelines:

• **Garner formal support from highest authorities at the college.** The strategies should be formally approved by the highest levels of the organization, including the college’s governing board and president.

• **Provide value as a communication device.** A well-crafted set of strategies becomes an agreement among stakeholders about what defines success in the college and what it takes to be successful. The formal documentation of the strategies should therefore be concise and understandable.

• **Give sufficient advance notice of relevant changes.** The strategies might call for changes to existing strategies and practices that would have an important impact on stakeholders. For example, a change on differential tuition would need to be finalized in time to be communicated to students, prior to registration.

---

**Endnotes**


2 This idea is a more recent entry into public-sector budgeting, but has been supported by the success of budgeting methods such as “budgeting for outcomes.”