**ESS Strategic Planning – *Unit Strategic Plan Guidance***

***Overview***

This document provides guidance for the development of strategic plans for units within the Enrollment and Student Services division at WWU. Guidance is provided below for each component included in the [Unit Strategic Plan Template](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2024-02/ESS%20Planning%20-%20Unit%20Strategic%20Plan%20Template%20%282024%29.docx), followed by an overview of resources to support the planning process.

Notes:

* **Unit-level strategic plans should focus on the combined strategies and cumulative impacts of a group of departments** – as such, unit-level plans will be broad and encompassing.
* **Strategic plan components should become increasingly specific as the document progresses** – with the mission being further defined by the goals, the goals being further defined by the strategies, and the strategies being further defined by measures and targets.
* **Lengthy descriptions (e.g. paragraphs) for individual components are discouraged** – clear, concise, focused statements are strongly preferred.
* **Not all components included in the strategic plan templates (and described below) are strictly required** – units may modify the templates as necessary to better suit their operations and structures. However, it is worth noting that all units are expected to report on goals, assessment measures, and assessment outcomes on an annual basis.

***Plan Components***

**Vision**: This is an optional component for unit strategic plans, defined as *an aspirational statement of purpose* – a statement which can answer the question of “what will it look like if our unit achieves its mission?” Units may also choose to include the vision statement from the [ESS Strategic Plan](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2024-02/ESS%20Strategic%20Plan%20%282024%29.pdf) (“every student graduates, prepared for a life of growth and purpose”) in lieu of developing a more specific statement, recognizing that each unit has a role in fulfilling the overall vision of the division.

**Mission:** A mission is *a descriptive statement of purpose summarizing the programs and impacts of a unit* – a statement which can succinctly answer the question of “what will our unit do, and what will our overall impacts be?” This statement should be specific enough to be meaningful, but broad enough to encompass the primary functions of the unit, including types of programs/services and principal reason(s) for providing those programs/services. An effective mission statement should both clearly communicate the purpose of the unit to students (and other stakeholders) and create a shared identity amongst unit staff.

Format: “Unit will do what to why” or “Unit will why by doing what”

Emphasis: Overall functions (the “what”) and impacts (the “why”)

Example: *Student Success Initiatives will maximize student retention, persistence, and continued success through strong inclusive outreach and support programs.*

**Mission Support:** Below the mission statement is a section for briefly describing how the mission of the unit supports the mission of the division. This component should be a straightforward, succinct answer to the question of “how will our unit contribute to the overall impacts of the division?” (It will be necessary to consult the [ESS Strategic Plan](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2024-02/ESS%20Strategic%20Plan%20%282024%29.pdf) to develop this component.)

**Service Population:** This component answers the question of “who does our unit serve?” For many unit, it may be appropriate to include the language of the [ESS Strategic Plan](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2024-02/ESS%20Strategic%20Plan%20%282024%29.pdf), to serve “all students – past, present, and future.” Those units focusing on particular populations of students are encouraged to be more specific for this component.

**ADEI Statement:** This component answers the mission-critical question of “how does the work of this unit support access, diversity, equity, and inclusion?” It may be helpful to first draft a unit goal related to ADEI work, and then to summarize that goal and its corresponding strategies for this statement. It may also be useful to reference Goal #2 (“actively pursue justice and equity in policies, practices, services, and impacts”) and the corresponding strategies in the [ESS Strategic Plan](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2024-02/ESS%20Strategic%20Plan%20%282024%29.pdf), and then describe how the unit will support the ADEI work of the division.

**Goals:** Unit goals are *descriptive outcomes statements specifying what a unit will accomplish, and how, in fulfilling its mission*. A strong set of goals should expand on the unit mission statement and clearly answer the questions of “what are our desired outcomes, and how will we achieve those outcomes?” Goal statements should be concise, actionable, and measurable.

Format: “To achievewhat by doing how” or “To do how to achieve what”

Emphasis: Cumulative outcomes (the “what”), types of programs/services (the “how”)

Example: *To increase student retention and success through effective outreach and support services*

**ESS Linkage**: Below each goal is a section to indicate which division goal is supported by that particular unit goal. Units are encouraged to develop goals while keeping in mind corresponding division goals, and especially those with strategies assigned to the unit in question. Please note that because strategic plans become more detailed and specific at each successive level (from division to unit to department), it may be appropriate for strategies assigned at the division level to be included as goals at the unit level.

**Strategies:** Unit strategies are *statements that identify the programs/services by which a unit goal will be accomplished*. Effective strategies expand on the corresponding goal statement, to provide additional details regarding how desired outcomes will be achieved. Each goal may have several corresponding strategies, each defining specific department(s) tasked with accomplishing the strategy. Strategies need not be complete statements and may simply identify programs/services by type or name.

Format: “To provide program/service to increase outcome”

Emphasis: Specific programs/services, specific outcomes

Example: *Provide collaborative programs and services to support new students*

**Depts Tasked**: Below each strategy is a section to indicate which departments are tasked with implementing the strategy. This section may be updated periodically as unit planning and resourcing evolve. Please note that strategies assigned at the unit level will likely be included as goals at the department level.

**Measures:** An (assessment) measure is *a measurable criterion used to determine the extent to which a unit goal is accomplished*, and clearly answers the question of “how will our desired outcome be measured?” Measures can also be thought of as performance indicators, and usually can be quantified by a number or percentage. Units are encouraged to have at least one measure per strategy, and to assess each measure at least annually (and in some cases, quarterly).

Example: *First-to-second year retention rate of first-year students served*

Note: Annual assessment (of measures defined in strategic plans) is one of the three defined mechanisms by which Unit Strategic Priorities may be identified, and therefore how new resourcing may be requested!

**Targets:** An (assessment) target is *the desired outcome of a specific assessment measure for a defined goal timeframe*, and identifies a specific answer to the question of “how will we know if our desired outcome has been achieved?” It is worth noting that the default timeframe for goals in unit strategic plans is defined by the stated plan period (e.g., 2021-2024), and targets should be set accordingly.

**Collaborations:** This section highlights strategies which are by definition collaborative and identifies collaborating departments and primary contacts for each. This component is intended to be informative to external stakeholders and/or new staff who may be reviewing the plan and will also be compiled at the division level to identify and support cross-dept/unit synergies.

**Special Initiatives:** A special initiative is a *short-term strategy identified in a unit strategic plan to address an emerging opportunity or challenge*. While it is possible for this component to be completed during the long-term strategic planning process (if short-term initiatives are anticipated), it is more likely for this component to be completed later in the strategic plan period, as a response to an emerging opportunity or challenge. As such, this component has been included as an appendix to be used as necessary to address issues which arise in the pursuit of pursuing long-term strategies.

For each special initiative, identify the following:

* The opportunity/challenge in need of addressing (*why a new strategy is necessary*)
* The strategic recommendation to address that opportunity/challenge (*what your new strategy will be*)
* The evidence to support this approach (*why this is the right strategy*) – which may consist of departmental/institutional data, researched best practices, etc.
* The critical resources required to fulfill the recommendation (*what you need for this strategy to be successful)*
* The key staff required to fulfill the recommendation (*who will be assigned this strategy*)
* The initiative timeframe (*how long this strategy will take to be successful*)
* A corresponding assessment measure and target (*how will you measure the success of this strategy, and what is your desired outcome?*)

Note: A special initiative is one of the three defined mechanisms by which Unit Strategic Priorities may be identified, and therefore how new resourcing may be requested!

***Process Resources***

The strategic planning process will look different for each unit in the division, based on whether an entirely new plan is being drafted, an older plan is being updated, or an alternative approach is being taken. Units are encouraged to approach this work in the way that best suits their needs, and the following resources are provided to support the process.

**Strategy Table**: For many units, it will make sense to start with the [Strategy Table](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2021-02/ESS%20Planning%20-%20Strategy%20Table%20Template.docx) tool rather than attempting to populate a blank plan template. This tool is designed to support drafting of strategic plan components, *laying out all of the primary components on a single page, to provide a comprehensive overview and to highlight connections between components*. This tool can be especially useful once some initial components have been identified or developed, as those can then be added to the tool and planning gaps can be identified (most unit strategic plans will already have some initial components defined by the [ESS Strategic Plan](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2024-02/ESS%20Strategic%20Plan%20%282024%29.pdf)).

It may be effective to initially work through the Strategy Table with a small leadership team, and then once the table has been populated, to seek feedback from additional staff to answer the following questions:

* Do you see the overall functions and impacts of your work reflected in these components?
* Do you see any significant overall functions or impacts not addressed in these components?

Once the Strategy Table has been reviewed and refined, the components may be copied and pasted into the [Unit Strategic Plan Template](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2024-02/ESS%20Planning%20-%20Unit%20Strategic%20Plan%20Template%20%282024%29.docx) to be expanded with additional details.

**Mission Statement Exercise**: The [Mission Statement Exercise](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2020-07/ESS%20Planning%20-%20Mission%20Exercise.pptx) is provided for the use of departments and units wishing to engage a group of staff *to develop an entirely new mission statement*. It is designed to be completed in 90 minutes through interactive group processes. It is simple and straightforward and good for encouraging big-picture thinking and building buy-in amongst staff.

**Goal Setting Exercise**: The [Goal Setting Exercise](https://vpess.wwu.edu/files/2020-07/ESS%20Planning%20-%20Goals%20Exercise.pptx) is provided for the use of departments and units wishing to engage a group of staff *to develop an entirely new set of goals based off of a mission statement*. It is designed to be completed in 90 minutes through interactive group processes. It is simple and straightforward and good for generating an initial list of goals to be expanded with additional details.

**Still have unanswered questions about the strategic planning process?**

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