



Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

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2018

**Revised  
Campus  
Strategic  
Planning  
Guidelines  
and  
Procedures**

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Handbook for Institutions

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# Campus Strategic Planning Guidelines and Procedures

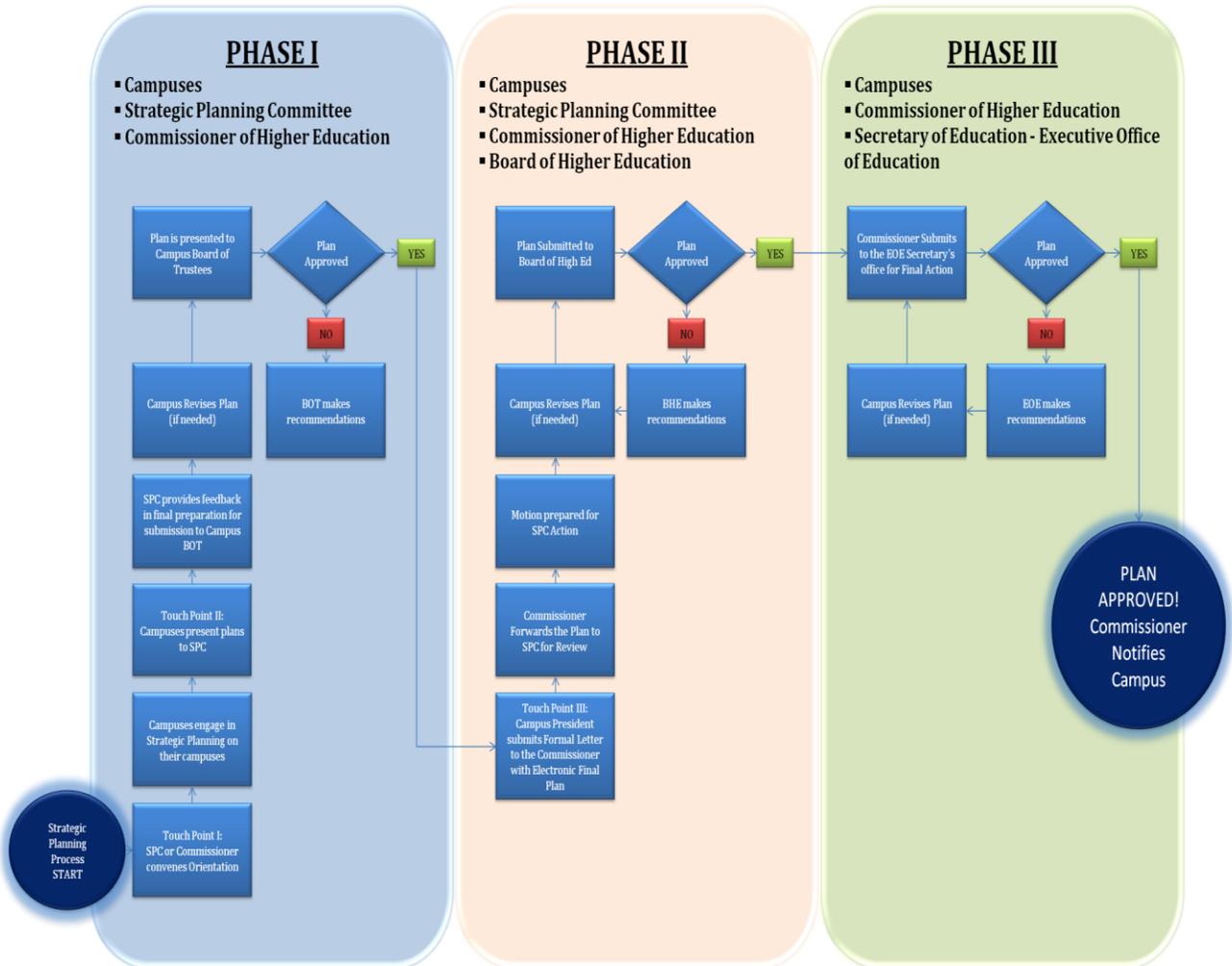
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## STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS MAP<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> After a Partnership Plan for a special mission institution has been approved, it shall be transmitted to the secretary of administration and finance, the chairs of the house and senate committees on ways and means, and the house and senate chairs of the joint committee on higher education.

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## MESSAGE FROM COMMISSIONER

Dear Colleagues,

As we grow our system of public higher education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, it is essential that we recognize the uniqueness of our institutions and the significant role they play in the communities in which they reside. I say this while acknowledging that the faculty and staff members that teach and guide our students within each institution make such a difference in their lives. Thus, when you set out to develop the strategic pathway for your campus over the next five years, it is your leadership as well as the full participation of all members of your campus community that is vital to ensuring the right strategic plan to guide your institutions into the future.

The Board of Higher Education (BHE) staff and I wish to support your efforts in every way we can. The BHE has developed guidelines to ensure that Massachusetts' public institutions are working together toward the best outcomes for public education across the state. This Campus Strategic Planning Handbook has been prepared to help us work in a coordinated and intentional way, and to assist our campuses in developing their strategic plans.

May your journey be a productive one, in which you are inspired to learn together, create a positive impact on students and provide high academic quality that is responsive to the needs of Massachusetts' citizens and communities.

Sincerely,

Carlos E. Santiago  
Commissioner

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## INTRODUCTION

A fundamental responsibility of the Board of Higher Education (BHE) is to provide overall direction to the state’s system of public higher education. The Board enacts this responsibility by establishing statewide goals and regularly measuring and reporting progress toward these goals. Review and approval of campus strategic plans is another important aspect of this role. The BHE also seeks to use its review of campus strategic plans to inform its own system-wide efforts and to support campuses as they engage in the important work of setting their own strategic directions. The BHE will be guided in this endeavor by the BHE Campus Strategic Planning Committee (SPC).

Chapter 15, Section 7 of MGL states that the Secretary of Education will, in consultation with the council (BHE) “...have the authority to approve, reject, or propose amendments to said plan.” New strategic plans should satisfy the requirements of both the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and the Executive Office of Education (EOE), to avoid sending mixed signals or duplicating effort. They should also be sufficient for DHE/BHE approval of “Partnership Plans” that govern special-purpose campuses with tuition retention authority. Partnership plan proposals shall include performance standards specific to the mission of the institution, and to the extent possible they should be aligned with the performance measurement system in effect across the public system.

While current system-wide goals build upon those of the past, college-level plans can be strengthened by expanding their scope to go beyond addressing current goals, to include a fuller consideration of strategic opportunities, challenges, and choices, as well as the underlying business model. These new plans should serve not only as a roadmap for the individual campuses, but as part of a coherent plan for the higher education system as a whole – at both a regional and statewide level. In addition, such plans should provide a reliable and sufficient basis for guiding the BHE and staff in evaluating the strategic purpose of new program proposals.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA FOR REVIEW

The BHE recognizes that each campus has its own unique mission, culture, community and region. To support autonomy and individuality, campus strategic plans should reflect these unique characteristics. The following principles guide the BHE’s criteria for reviewing campus strategic plans:

- **Be true to mission.** Each campus should select a planning process that works best for them and is reflective of the campus’ unique mission, culture, community, and region.
- **Focus on goals.** Each campus should determine how to best align their strategic plans with the system-wide goals, and to organize their work and resources to achieve strategic objectives.

The BHE will review campus strategic plans based on the following four criteria: campus planning process; goals; strategies and metrics.

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### A. THE CAMPUS PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process should be transparent and inclusive, involving “the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes” (NEASC Standard 2.1). The planning

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process should be a vehicle for cultivating a commitment from all members of the campus community, allowing institutions to grow, change and adapt practices as needed to achieve their goals.

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## B. GOALS

The plan should explicitly address the system goals of college participation, college completion, and closing achievement gaps. Other elements previously incorporated such as student learning outcomes, workforce alignment, and preparing citizens can also be addressed. The plan should also be aligned with regional economic and workforce development priorities, and include close consultation with UMass, state universities, and community colleges in the region to ensure strategic alignment, program integration, and cost-effectiveness, while closing gaps and increasing completion rates. Plans should include initiatives to deepen integration with local P-12 districts, including vocational-technical schools and be utilized to identify opportunities for innovation. In addition, plans should provide a sufficient framework for new programs that BHE will be asked to consider for approval, as well as highlight areas of strategic divestment (i.e. what programs or elements a campus expects will sunset during this period).

- i. **Campus goals.** In the early phase of planning, campuses should take the opportunity to define their individual benchmarks and goals in the context of the overarching system strategies. BHE's strategic plan review will focus on system-wide goals even as BHE recognizes that campus strategic plans will include areas of focus, such as financial goals and benchmarks that are clearly defined and specific to a campus' unique identity. BHE will look for goals to be reflective of where the campus is situated among peer institutions. BHE is particularly interested in understanding enrollment estimates and projections as they relate to the strategic plan as well as the array of programs a campus may be planning to develop.
- ii. **Changes in system-wide goals.** BHE may decide to amend or extend the system-wide goals to be included in campus strategic plans, but such changes will not require campuses to modify plans previously approved by the BHE. Rather, the BHE will discuss with campus leaders how the modified statewide goals can most reasonably be advanced within the framework of the current plan or in the next strategic planning cycle. As the BHE Performance Measurement System evolves, campus goals and benchmarks will be reviewed to ensure that they are well aligned with it and that campus goals are embedded in a strong understanding of the campus context and potential. A Partnership Plan is expected to align with system-wide goals with specific performance standards relevant to the mission of the institution.

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## C. STRATEGIES

The plan should provide "feasible priorities and a realistic course of action" (NEASC Standard 2.3). While the BHE has no specific requirements with regard to the strategies and programs that each campus uses to achieve its goals, the Board does seek to understand that a campus has a plausible theory of action and operational business plan underlying its proposed strategy.

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## D. METRICS

To the maximum extent possible, the plan should include clear measures for evaluating progress on strategic planning goals over the course of the plan's duration, including both qualitative and quantitative methods (NEASC Standard 2.5). Campuses may also devise public data dashboards that can be used by college boards (and others) to evaluate progress over time. There should be a plan for using metrics to share annual progress with BHE.

The Partnership Plan for special mission institutions must include budget and enrollment projections for each year, projections for total student charges for each year, projections for in-state and out-of-state enrollments for each year, and plans to ensure continuing access to the institution by residents of the commonwealth and affirmative action policies and programs that affirm the need for and a commitment to maintaining and increasing access for economically disadvantaged and minority students.

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## THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

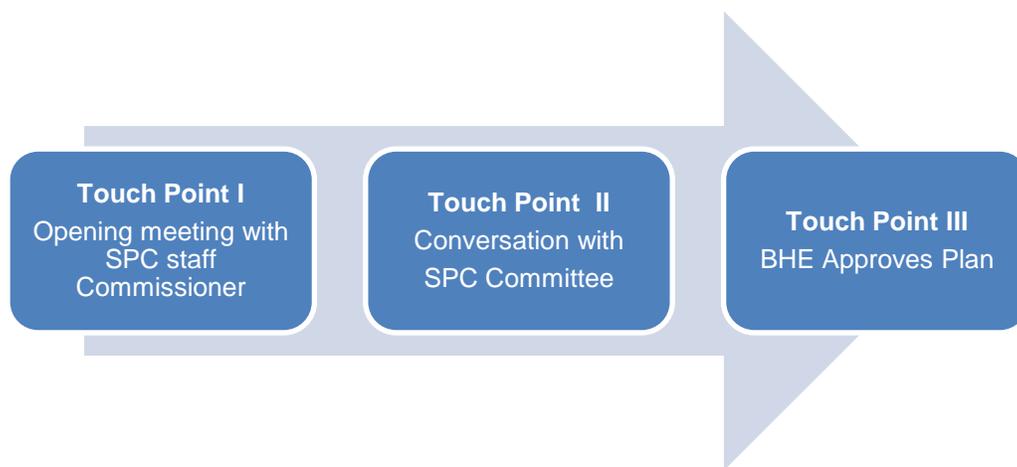
The following principles guide the BHE's process for reviewing campus strategic plans:

- A. **Communication is critical.** Communicate with campus constituents at the front end of the planning process, beginning a year in advance, and continue throughout the planning process. Facilitate the plan's progress toward approval by the BHE once it comes time for the formal vote. Recognize and support the consensus-building nature of strategic planning, and avoid needing to make substantive changes late in the planning process.
- B. **Establish a partnership.** Develop a collegial, partnership-approach to BHE and campus interaction. Facilitate the development of supportive relationships among planning groups from the various institutions in the Massachusetts system.
- C. **Foster mutual learning.** Share helpful information among and between campuses and BHE through identifying and disseminating effective practices.

## PROCESS OVERVIEW

The BHE will use a three-touch point process for reviewing campus strategic plans. DHE staff is available to provide support for campuses as needed and helpful during this process.

Each phase in the process is reviewed and campuses are provided with an opportunity to share information and insights regarding their planning process. SPC members offer commentary and guidance to the campuses regarding what they will be looking for when it comes time to approve the plan.



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## PHASE I

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### TOUCH POINT I

#### A. Kick-Off - Campus Cohort convenes with Strategic Planning Committee staff and Commissioner

At the direction of the Commissioner, BHE staff work with a cohort of campuses or an individual campus for the SPC Kick-Off. The strategic planning process begins with Touch Point I, a convening of the SPC staff and Commissioner with the President and campus leadership teams that will be engaged in strategic planning in the months ahead.

#### B. Campus Engagement - Ensures a spirit of collaboration and inclusivity

Campus leaders work to engage faculty, students, staff and administrators in a highly inclusive and collaborative planning process. BHE staff will support campuses with an online platform of strategic planning resources, practices, and documents that Massachusetts public campuses have found helpful. BHE staff will work to link campuses that are at similar stages in their strategic planning cycle, and provide mutual learning opportunities.

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### TOUCH POINT II

#### C. Campus and Committee Convene - Campuses present work-in-progress and SPC provides feedback.

Prior to a campus board vote and at a point in the process where the overall shape of the plan has been given preliminary definition, the committee and the campus will discuss the emerging plan including goals, metrics, and strategies linked to system-wide goals and objectives. This takes place when it is still early enough that changes can be made without major disruption to campus-level work. Touch Point II is intended to be collegial and formative in nature.

The purpose of this conversation is to provide the campus with a clear signal as to whether the emerging plan is consistent with BHE criteria. If the answer is “yes”, the campus can move forward in anticipation of a positive SPC vote during Phase II. If the answer is “no”, the campus will be expected to strengthen aspects of the plan that do not meet the criteria, and have a follow-up conversation with the SPC. In all cases, BHE expects to use existing structures for monitoring enrollment, finances and campus achievement of the system-wide goals reflected in strategic plans.

#### D. Campus Board Approval

Each institution must obtain their campus board approval before submitting the plan to the SPC. Campus boards may make suggestions and recommendations to modify or add something to the plan. In all cases the campus board must approve the final strategic plan proposal before it moves to the SPC.

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## PHASE II

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### TOUCH POINT III

#### A. Formal Submission

After the plan is approved by the campus board of trustees, the President writes a formal letter to the Commissioner accompanied by the final strategic plan. Campus staff collaborates with board staff to ensure all aspects of the plan are included in the correct, accessible format. The Commissioner forwards the plan to the members of the SPC.

#### B. SPC Review

The SPC members review the plan and provide feedback to the Commissioner. Any clarifying questions from the SPC members are provided to the Commissioner who will dialog with the President as necessary.

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### STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE ACTION

#### C. SPC Action

Staff prepares a motion to be brought forward for SPC action. At this juncture, the plan may be approved by SPC and moved for full BHE action. It is also possible that the plan may need to be revised and resubmitted at the next SPC meeting. It is expected that revisions would be addressed prior to a plan being brought for SPC vote.

#### D. SPC Approval

A motion is brought forward and the SPC formally votes to approve the plan.

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### BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACTION

#### E. BHE Action

Subsequent to SPC approval of the campus strategic plan, the motion is brought forward for BHE action. BHE will approve the plan or make recommendations for revisions.

#### F. BHE Approval

The SPC motion is brought forward for full BHE approval.

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## PHASE III

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### EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF EDUCATION REVIEW

#### A. Secretary Review

Subsequent to BHE approval of the campus strategic plan, the Commissioner submits the plan to the Secretary of the Executive Office of Education for review.

#### B. Secretary Response to the Commissioner

The Secretary will provide final approval of the plan or make recommendations for final revisions.

#### C. Campus Notification

The Commissioner will notify the campus President of the Secretary's final approval.

## MONITORING CAMPUS PROGRESS

The BHE will use existing statutory and policy structures for monitoring campus achievement of the system-wide goals reflected in campus strategic plans, including presidential evaluations and performance measurement and data dashboards. Merging and aligning your strategic plan with the developing BHE Performance Measurement System is expected to be both an emergent process as well as one that ensures rigorous review of benchmarks and metrics that are used as a guide to determine institutional performance.

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## SUBMISSION

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### SUBMITTING YOUR PLAN

Strategic Plans should be submitted by providing one printed copy to Dr. Winifred M. Hagan at the Department of Higher Education with a flash drive containing an electronic copy in MS Word Format. Also email a copy to [whagan@bhe.mass.edu](mailto:whagan@bhe.mass.edu) and [csantiago@bhe.mass.edu](mailto:csantiago@bhe.mass.edu).