

# Admin 101: How to Plan for Strategic Planning

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/admin101-howto-plan-for-strategic-planning/>

By

Fairly new to administration at the time, I had never participated in strategic planning myself, but almost everyone else there had. And their reviews of that experience were decidedly mixed.

Among their biggest complaints:

- x Despite good intentions, the process often ended up disorganized.
- x Too many committees were created. And each of them had too many members.
- x Instead of being a tool to set priorities, the strategic plan turned into a checklist of everybody's hopes, dreams, and delusions often with internal contradictions.
- x A year or two after a splashy kickoff, most people felt no sense of accomplishment or closure.

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Almost every college or university has experts in management, sociology, organizational psychology, organizational communication, and the like. Use them. Bring them together on a preplanning committee ~~task~~ it with organizing the formal planning process, structuring the future committees that will produce the plan, and selecting potential participants.

Their wisdom, I'm willing to bet, will set practical guidelines to avoid a ~~fire~~ fall in the planning process. Chances are, these same academics also know the campus well

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As a result, many groups on the campus felt slighted by the planning process. A strategic plan that is perceived as a *fait accompli* will not elicit much passion from bystanders.

In [a previous essay](#), I discussed the trade-offs of “playing favorites.” In brief, I argued that favoritism—defined as tipping the scales in someone’s favor because of personal friendship or for political advantage—is ethically wrong and undermines trust. Yet if certain people consistently ~~perform~~ perform well in the tasks you’ve given them, favoring them with other important assignments is a necessary part of successful administration.

The tricky part, then, is matching the right person with the job. In choosing leaders of the various planning committees, consider whether they have:

- x Relevant expertise on the topic the committee will explore.
- x The ability to deliberate dispassionately and not be seen as the champion of a particular position.
- x A consistent record of working with diverse groups of people.
- x A strong work ethic, and a willingness to devote the necessary time to the endeavor.
- x A reputation for efficiency—the ability to do good work and still meet the deadlines.

Don’t expect to find the perfect chair for every committee. Just think carefully about who is most likely to propel the planning process forward.

Set up a reward system. Different faculty members will put different degrees of time, energy, and conscientiousness into the service work they do during different phases of their careers. (The Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman famously remarked that he’d made a point of being consistently terrible at departmental service so that administrators would leave him alone to focus on his research.)

But as an administrator, if you truly believe that strategic planning matters, that it’s not just supposed to replicate the city-council meeting at Potemkin Village—then—you have to offer tangible, substantial rewards to the people who lead the effort. Typically the opposite happens:

x A vice provost is told, "You will head the strategic planning team."