

Additional Guidance Regarding the “Strategic Initiative” Process

Definitions drawn from Merriam-Webster Dictionary and dictionary.com

Strategic:

- necessary to or important in the initiative or completion of a strategic plan
- of great importance within an integrated whole or to a planned effect
- essential to a strategy (see below)
- of, relating to, or marked by strategy (see below)

Strategy:

- a plan, method, or series of actions designed to attain a specific goal or result
- a careful plan or method
- the art of devising or employing plans toward a goal

Initiative:

- An introductory act or step; leading action

A. Operational Definition of Strategic Initiative (for NVC Planning Purposes)

A **Strategic Initiative** describes an action or series of actions that will help realize the institutional mission by promoting (a) specific component(s) of the Educational Master Plan (EMP).

The **Institutional Planning Priorities** for 2026-2027 and 2027-2028 provide “Additional Guidance” to help operationalize the EMP – by identifying specific areas of focus, including reference to specific metrics in the EMP and campuswide initiatives that are already underway (e.g., implementation of Guided Pathways framework, 15 to Finish Initiative).

As described in the **Institutional Planning Priorities**, the desired features of a Strategic Initiative include:

- Alignment with student-centered, equity-focused, community-oriented, and social justice-related aspects of the Mission and Values Statements
- Impact of the initiative – through direct alignment with EMP Goals and Strategic Actions/Potential Strategies to increase institutional performance on specific metrics listed in the EMP
- Support of other institutional plans or plans emerging from program review
- Focus on improving the student experience
- Exploration of tools to promote operational efficiencies

Ideally, Strategic Initiatives will require collaboration across different programs, services, and/or units of the organization. The Planning Committee will assess each initiative via the [Prioritization Rubric](#).

B. Three Types of Submissions through Annual Planning and Resource Allocation Process

There are three different paths for submitting innovative ideas or/and resource requests during the annual planning and resource allocation process. The table below provides a general guide to help determine the appropriate path of submission, based on the type of project or request being submitted.

Consideration Criteria	Submission Path/Type
○ new, innovative practice (doesn't currently exist) ○ focused on student success/experience ○ primary driver is planning; associated resource needs are secondary ○ multi-step implementation plan ○ multiple areas of institution engaged in implementation ○ implementation might require a variety of resources (allocation could be multi-year)	 Strategic Initiative
○ implementation of practice designed to promote effectiveness/increase efficiencies in existing practices ○ focused on process improvement (for students or operations) ○ primary driver is acquiring new resources – which will realize cost savings or generate revenue ○ identifies specific resource (e.g., technology platform/product, equipment) ○ selection of resource could involve one area or multiple areas of the institution ○ one budget center allocated funding and assigned responsibility for the resource	 Organizational Optimization
○ maintains existing practices ○ focused on resource needs of a specific unit/“Budget Center” ○ primary driver is acquiring additional resources – to maintain current levels of service/offerings ○ identifies specific resource (e.g., supplies, equipment, technology, increased cost of service contracts, professional development, budget augmentation) to maintain current operations ○ selection of resource involves one unit ○ requesting budget center allocated funding and assigned responsibility for the resource	 Operational Continuance
 denotes a process coordinated by Planning Committee/RPIE	
 denotes a process coordinated by Budget Committee/Business Office	

C. Examples of Strategic Initiatives (Past Actual Submissions)

To provide additional guidance, some examples of recent Strategic Initiatives are provided below. The brief descriptions under each item align with the Consideration Criteria outlined above:

- [new, innovative practice (doesn't currently exist)]
 - focused on student success/experience
 - multi-step implementation plan
 - multiple areas of institution engaged in implementation
 - implementation might require a variety of resources (allocation could be multi-year)
- Transition to Becoming a Distance Education Teaching College (submitted in 2024-2025 cycle)
 - helps promote student completion
 - steps included technology infrastructure, equipment, training for faculty reviewers
 - areas involved included Distance Education, Institutional Technology, Academic Senate
 - resources included technology, equipment, staffing, professional development
- Creation of Inclusive Spaces on Campus (submitted in 2024-2025 cycle)
 - contributes to a welcoming environment for students
 - steps included architectural design, multi-year implementation
 - areas involved included Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Cultural Spaces Workgroup
 - resources included facilities, equipment
- Select and Implement Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System (submitted in 2025-2026 cycle)
 - enhance students engagement by centralizing communications to students
 - steps included analysis of products, recommendation for selection, training for staff
 - areas involved included Marketing, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs
 - resources included technology, operating budget, professional development
- Preparation for Offering Bachelor's Degree in Respiratory Care (submitted in 2025-2026 cycle)
 - expand educational opportunities for students
 - SI submission communicated future needs associated with new program
 - cost-neutral for year 1 (2025-2026)

Note: All of the SIs listed above are in the process of being implemented at NVC.

D. Guiding Principles

Beginning with the End in Mind (drawn from Campus Forum, November 2025)

- Prioritize **student success** (as conveyed through NVC's institutional priorities, EMP, mission)
- Improve **organizational efficiency** (financial viability, technological solutions, optimization of resources and processes)
- Define **intended outcomes** and reimagining historical processes to achieve today's goals
- Create **space for iteration** (methodical planning, decision-making, and implementation)

E. Possible Approaches

- Collaborate to develop a new/innovative idea between now and early December (for 2026-2027 planning)
- Begin collaborating now, with planning discussions to continue into 2026 – to prepare an SI submission for the 2027-2028 planning cycle
- Submit an SI for 2026-2027 to communicate future intentions:
 - use 2026-2027 to evaluate options (cost-neutral; consider using the “Planning Template” to identify the current challenge and outline a plan for improvement)
 - during the 2027-2028 process, submit an Organizational Optimization request to secure the new technology/resource needed to increase efficiency
- Submit an SI based on discussions at recent/past meetings

F. Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Strategic Initiatives (SIs)

1. If I submitted a Strategic Initiative last year and it was either partially funded or not funded, should I resubmit this year?

*Yes, you should resubmit your SI. If the initiative was partially funded, the submission should be updated to reflect what is still needed. *Note that both the SI Submission Form and the Prioritization Rubric have been updated since last year. Resubmission will ensure consistency in the scoring and ranking (based on the current rubric).*

2. If my Strategic Initiative requires staffing, should I not submit it or remove that portion of the resource request?

Similarly: If my Strategic Initiative requires a high-cost item or long-term investment, should I not submit it at this time or remove that portion of the resource request?

The SI submission should identify all resources that are required for implementation (as anticipated at this time). Even if the SI is not supported/funded this year, submission of the SI helps communicate future plans and can be incorporated into future grant proposals.

3. Should I submit a Strategic Initiative if its scope is limited to one program/service/unit (i.e., my own department)?

Yes, you can submit an SI focused on one program or area of the institution. (Alignment with program-level plans is one of the factors included on the Prioritization Rubric.) You might consider reaching out to other programs to expand the scope of the initiative and its potential impact. It is possible that the NVC Foundation might be able to support/help address some needs among individual programs.

4. What should I do if I am still not sure which path I should use to submit my idea?

As a first step, consult your Vice President, as they can provide additional guidance if you describe the nature of the idea/submission to them. In some cases, it might be appropriate to submit through multiple paths. RPIE or the Business Office will communicate with you if they recommend a different/additional submission path.

Key Take-Away: We want to encourage innovation across the institution and welcome the identification of new ideas through the SI submission process – whether the initiatives are supported, partially funded, fully funded, or not funded.