Scenario planning is an intentional and organized method for considering and incorporating “what if’s” into the planning framework. Scenario planning has been used in an array of settings and is becoming increasingly useful for strategic planning purposes in higher education (Sayers, 2010). As such, the RP Group and the IEPI Integrated Planning team streamlined information from the literature review to develop a tool that helps facilitate scenario planning at local institutions.

**Scenario Planning**

*A Step-by-Step Walkthrough*

**The Seven Steps of Scenario Planning (Sayers, 2010):**

Although the seven steps are a condensed interpretation of the necessary actions to take in the scenario planning process, leaders of planning committees can leverage this worksheet to help guide their efforts when utilizing scenario planning. Below is a walkthrough approach of each step using an example relevant to student success.

**How do I Incorporate Scenario Planning?**

**Step 1🡪 Plan the Process**

*In this step, the goal is to set the stage for an effective planning process (identify committee members, committee purpose, and committee resources):*

* What members can we include that will be engaged, diverse, and responsive?
* Establish early on the intent of the planning process. What is the goal for gathering together?
* Are logistics in place to maximize current resources for the planning effort?

**Step 2🡪 Decide on a Focus**

*In this step, after members are identified, work to gain consensus on the central issue:*

* What do we want to address/change?
* What issues will the committee decide upon to direct their efforts?
* EXAMPLE: What do we want student success at our college to look like in 10 years?

**Step 3🡪 Trend Analysis**

*In this step, the goal is to determine which factors you think will most impact the decision focus:*

* How many relevant political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental (PESTLE) factors can we identify?
* Which are the most salient in terms of potential influence on our intended vision/plan?
* This is a pivotal step. List out all potential PESTLE factors for the whole committee to view, and then begin rating their importance (see the scroll figure):

***PESTLE Factors:***

Starting at this step, we will begin using the student success example above.

1. **Funding**
2. **Demographic Shifts**
3. **Election Results**
4. **MOOCs**
5. **Labor Market**
6. **External competition for FTES**

**Step 4🡪 Determine Uncertainties**

*In this step, the goal is to distinguish between steady or certain PESTLE factors from uncertain ones:*

* Of these, which does the committee feel are unstable and most relevant or should be discussed first?

***PESTLE Factors:***

******

Uncertain (unpredictable with current trends)

1. **Funding**
2. **Demographic Shifts**
3. **Election Results**
4. **MOOCs**
5. **Labor Market**
6. **External competition for FTES**

Uncertain (unpredictable with current trends)

**Step 5🡪Scenario Logics**

*In this step, the goal is to begin to build the scenarios using a double-variable approach:*

* Using Funding and External Competition for FTES, employ the double-variable approach:

Notice we now have distinct quadrants for the purpose of building scenarios.

**Strong state funding**

**2**

**1**

**High external competition for FTES**

**Low external competition for FTES**

**4**

**3**

**Weak state funding**

**Step 6🡪Enrich the Scenarios**

*In this step, the goal is to develop content in each of the quadrants (build the scenarios):*

* Go back to the identified PESTLE factors (see step 3) and insert them into each quadrant.
* What scenario is surfacing up with these added elements?
* Analyze and discuss the implications of these scenarios on your college’s plan.
* Name the scenarios.

**Strong state funding**

Demographic Shifts Election Results

MOOCs

Labor Market

Demographic Shifts Election Results

MOOCs

Labor Market

**High external competition for FTES**

**Low external competition for FTES**

Demographic Shifts Election Results MOOCs

Labor Market

Demographic Shifts Election Results

MOOCs

Labor Market

**AFTER STEP 7**, come back to these remaining three scenarios and begin to follow the same process (analyzing, naming, and implementing strategy for each quadrant).

With high external competition and weak state funding, the continued diversification of the community college student body makes matters difficult for your college to hire enough ESL professors to meet their needs. Progression rates are trending downward. Other colleges are rapidly applying for the minimal grants available and are hiring faculty and staff to meet the needs of the FTES they are trying to take from your college’s feeder district, not to mention the additional competition of MOOCs and a labor market promising decent wages without any years of post-secondary education. How can our plan be flexible enough to adapt to these pressures if this scenario were to manifest?

**Weak state funding**

**Name the Scenario for future reference**

“I Hope Not”

**Step 7🡪Implement Strategy**

*In this step, the goal is to test the robustness of current strategies to determine how tenable your plan is in light of newly identified scenarios:*

* Does our plan account for a “I Hope Not” future?
* Would we still be able to reach our intended targets?
* What we can do today: Enhance our fundraising personnel, closely monitor the ESL faculty to student body ratio, invest in professional development for our college’s grant writers, etc.
* Go back to each quadrant (the scenarios that need names) and test the tenability of the college’s plan under those circumstances.

**Additional Key Questions for Step 7 (Sayers, 2010):**

* What would our current decisions look like if this was the scenario of the future?
* How would each scenario influence our organization?
* How are we most vulnerable in each scenario?
* How could we prepare for each scenario?
* Are there actions we could take to bring about desirable scenarios, or avoid negative ones?
* How fast could the organization change to meet the challenges of each scenario?
* What do the scenarios suggest about our current strategies?

**Note**

This document was intended to introduce scenario planning by providing simple, step-by-step instructions and illustrations to help colleges understand how scenario planning works, what it is used for, as well as encourage colleges to adopt these steps to bolster their plans. It should also be noted that scenario planning can be conducted either when a plan is being developed, or after a plan is already developed. However, this document is not exhaustive, for a more thorough treatment of scenario planning please see <https://www.lfhe.ac.uk/filemanager/root/site_assets/research_resources/research/series_2/S2-4%20Sayers%20-%20Scenario%20Planning.pdf>.

**References**

All steps and information on this page were derived from the two sources below:

* Sayers, N. (2010). A Guide to Scenario Planning in Higher Education. Research and Development Series, Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, series 2, pub. 4
* Scenario Planning. (2008.). Retrieved from <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/full-guide/scenario-planning>