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# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: CHALLENGES, METRICS, AND TACTICAL SOLUTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLANNING

Stephanie Miller Gillen

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STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: CHALLENGES, METRICS, AND TACTICAL  
SOLUTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLANNING

by

Stephanie Miller Gillen

A DISSERTATION

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The College of Education and Human Services

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## **Abstract**

Effective stakeholder engagement is critical in higher education strategic planning, particularly as institutions face challenges such as changing demographics, technological advances, and evolving student expectations. This study explores the complexities of engaging diverse stakeholders, including students, faculty, community members, and governance, in the strategic planning process. Using a qualitative approach, the research examines how stakeholder engagement practices contribute to the development of strategic plans. The study emphasizes the importance of moving beyond superficial engagement to foster genuine collaboration and accountability, ultimately enhancing higher education institutions' adaptability. The research provides valuable insights for institutions aiming to enhance the efficacy of the strategic planning process.

*Keywords:* Stakeholder engagement, strategic planning, higher education, challenges

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

Stakeholder engagement in higher education strategic planning is the process by which institutions actively involve key individuals and groups to formulate and execute strategic plans. The process demonstrates an institution's commitment to inclusivity and collaboration, which begins at the inception of planning and continues through all stages. Stakeholder engagement is not merely a formality but the foundation upon which the strategic planning process is formed and plays a pivotal role in advancing the institution's mission, vision, and values.

In today's dynamic and competitive environment of higher education, institutions face numerous challenges, including fluctuating enrollment, changing regulations, and evolving student expectations. Stakeholder engagement is crucial, bringing diverse perspectives and expertise into the planning process, ensuring that strategic decisions are well-informed and comprehensive (Langrafe et al., 2020). Engaging stakeholders in strategic planning helps to align institutional goals with community needs and expectations, fostering ownership and accountability (Bryson, 2018).

Stakeholders in higher education are diverse, ranging from students and faculty to administrators, alums, donors, and community members. Each stakeholder brings unique perspectives, interests, and expertise to the strategic planning process (Bryson, 2018). Early engagement of these stakeholders ensures that the strategic plan reflects various opinions and identifies potential challenges. Stakeholder involvement in discussions and decision-making creates more transparency in the process and fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the outcomes. Stakeholder engagement also promotes value creation and improves organizational performance by addressing stakeholders' diverse needs and expectations in higher education (Harrison & Wicks, 2013; Freeman et al., 2020).

Effective stakeholder engagement requires more than just gathering input from stakeholders; it also necessitates the creation of meaningful opportunities for dialogue and collaboration. Freeman and McVea (2005) emphasize that stakeholders should actively formulate and implement strategic plans to ensure buy-in and support. The engagement process enriches the quality of the strategic plan and enhances the institution's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Stakeholders who feel heard and valued are more likely to champion the institution's strategic initiatives.

Furthermore, stakeholder engagement can lead to creative problem-solving and innovative solutions. Diverse perspectives often yield new ideas and approaches that a homogeneous group might overlook (Phillips, 2014). Diversity fosters richer dialogue and encourages the exploration of new strategies to more effectively address complex issues. Engaging stakeholders with varied experiences and backgrounds is critical for developing robust and effective strategic plans in higher education, where complexities require multifaceted solutions.

## **Context**

In recent years, higher education institutions (HEIs) have faced unprecedented challenges and opportunities due to rapid technological advances, shifting demographics, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have significantly altered the landscape of higher education, necessitating a reassessment of the planning process and strategic priorities. For instance, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital learning platforms and remote education, fundamentally changing how institutions engage with students and deliver education (Kumar & Pande, 2021). This shift highlights the need for strategic plans to address disruptions

while meeting stakeholders' needs. Technological advancements have driven a digital transformation requiring new engagement and education delivery strategies.

Moreover, trends in higher education have underscored the importance of sustainability, equity, and social responsibility. Institutions are increasingly expected to address these issues in strategic plans. The rise of student activism and the demand for more inclusive and equitable educational environments have raised pressure on institutions to involve stakeholders (Paterson, 2021). The urgency for HEIs to address pressing social issues has never been greater and students are calling for institutions to address these issues proactively. The time is now for institutions to respond to these calls and integrate the needs and desires of all stakeholders into their strategic planning process.

Effective stakeholder engagement is challenging. Strategic plans often face criticism for being bureaucratic formalities rather than actionable frameworks. Gardner (2021) notes that many strategic plans fail due to insularity and a lack of realistic goals. In addition, plans created without broad stakeholder involvement can lead to widespread disenchantment. For example, the University of Tulsa's 2017 strategic plan significantly disrupted the university (Gardner, 2021). Feeling excluded from the decision-making process, faculty members firmly resisted the plan, which called for sweeping academic reorganization, eliminating 40% of its programs. The situation escalated to a faculty vote of no confidence in the university's president and provost, highlighting the disconnect between the administration and the campus community (Gardner, 2021). The issues at the University of Tulsa exemplify how strategic plans lacking comprehensive stakeholder engagement can lead to significant institutional strife and undermine planning objectives.

Many institutions develop strategic plans in a vacuum, without understanding stakeholder needs and community conditions. Santilli from the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) emphasizes that plans should involve internal and external stakeholders (Gardner, 2021). However, a review of 108 HEI strategic plans conducted by RHB, a consulting company, revealed that nearly 60% of plans included no information about planning committee members, indicating a lack of stakeholder engagement and transparency (Gardner, 2021).

Engagement entails ensuring stakeholders are consistent recipients of communications and have opportunities for feedback and collaboration. Stakeholder engagement also establishes a culture of accountability, where stakeholders share the responsibility to achieve the outlined goals (Freeman et al., 2020; Harrison & Wicks, 2019). Successful engagement is integral to achieving institutional goals and plan execution, as it aligns diverse interests and expectations with the institution's strategic objectives.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study explores the complexities of stakeholder engagement in higher education strategic planning, providing insights and strategies for institutions to enhance stakeholder engagement by examining various stakeholders' strategies, dynamics, and challenges. The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge for more effective and inclusive planning processes helping to drive sustainable success.

The primary objective of this study is to gain insights from a stakeholder perspective. Traditionally, strategic planning in higher education has been driven from the top down, where senior administrators make decisions and communicate them to the rest of the institution. The top-down approach overlooks the input of those directly impacted by the decision-making process. This study highlights the importance of a more inclusive approach to strategic planning

that values the contributions of all academic community members by focusing on stakeholder perspectives.

Additionally, this study seeks to identify best practices and methodologies to engage stakeholders effectively. This study provides key insights for institutions that desire to improve their strategic planning process by examining the literature and quantitatively studying stakeholders involved in strategic planning efforts. Furthermore, the study aims to address the challenges and barriers institutions face in engaging stakeholders and provide actionable recommendations to help them to improve their strategic planning process. The goal is to promote a more inclusive, collaborative, and effective approach to strategic planning to help institutions achieve their long-term goals and maintain relevance in an ever-changing educational landscape.

### **Theoretical Framework Guiding Research**

This study's theoretical framework integrates stakeholder theory and participatory planning theory to provide a comprehensive approach to understanding stakeholder engagement in strategic planning in higher education. Stakeholder theory, first articulated by Freeman (1984), emphasizes the importance of considering the interests and influences of all stakeholders in the decision-making process. The theory underscores the need to identify stakeholders, understand their needs and expectations, and actively engage them throughout the strategic planning process. Stakeholder theory provides a robust framework for analyzing the relationships and interactions between institutions and their stakeholders.

Stakeholder Theory is particularly relevant in higher education as HEIs interact with diverse stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, alums, community members, and governance structures. Each of these groups has distinct needs, expectations, and levels of

influence. Recognizing and addressing these varied interests is crucial to develop strategic plans that reflect the institution's needs. Applying stakeholder theory to HEIs enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of the strategic planning process by fostering engagement among all stakeholders.

Participatory Planning Theory, conceptualized by Davidoff (1965), advocates for stakeholder engagement to ensure that strategic plans reflect the community's needs and aspirations. The theory emphasizes collaborative decision-making, transparency, and the creation of a shared vision that aligns stakeholder interests with institutional objectives. The participatory approach fosters ownership and commitment among stakeholders, making the planning process more inclusive and effective.

Participatory planning theory provides valuable insights into processes and practices facilitating effective stakeholder engagement. The theory emphasizes the importance of collaboration, transparency, and shared vision (Afzalan & Muller, 2018). Synthesizing these two theories creates a framework offering a holistic understanding of the dynamics of stakeholder engagement, the challenges institutions face, and the strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the strategic planning process in higher education. Stakeholder theory provides a foundational understanding of the stakeholders and the nature of their relationship with the institution, highlighting the importance of considering a wide range of interests. Meanwhile, participatory planning theory focuses on the methods and processes that can actively involve stakeholders and provide a practical guide for meaningful engagement.

The integration of stakeholder theory and participatory planning theory provides a comprehensive framework to guide the research. The framework will facilitate an in-depth examination of how HEIs identify and categorize stakeholders, understanding their diverse needs

and expectations. The framework will also allow for the exploration of the practical implementation of participatory planning methods. Applying the theoretical framework will provide valuable insights into best practices for stakeholder engagement, contributing to the growing body of knowledge for stakeholder engagement in HEI strategic planning processes.

### **Research Problem**

Several challenges and considerations surround the stakeholder experience in higher education strategic planning. This study examines stakeholder dynamics and explores challenges and solutions. The first part of the investigation will examine stakeholder theory and dynamics, the problems and factors that affect stakeholder engagement, and the P-20 effects of stakeholder engagement in strategic planning for higher education. Then, the study will explore the critical questions of how, from the stakeholder perspective, institutions can quantitatively measure the impact and outcomes of stakeholders' perceptions. Finally, tactical strategies will be identified to aid institutions in addressing these challenges.

The research problem is grounded in recognizing that stakeholder engagement is essential for successful strategic planning, although it is often fraught with problems. As Alexander (2000) discussed, institutions frequently struggle to engage stakeholders in meaningful ways, resulting in plans that lack broad support and fail to achieve desired outcomes. This study aims to address one aspect of these challenges by analyzing stakeholder engagement practices and identifying key strategies for improvement. The research questions are designed to provide an understanding of the factors influencing stakeholder engagement and identify practical strategies for enhancing the planning process.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guide this study:



1. What key challenges do HEIs face in effectively engaging stakeholders in the strategic planning process?
2. What factors impact stakeholder engagement in the strategic planning process?
3. What tactics can be employed to address the challenges of stakeholder engagement in the planning process?
4. How can HEIs measure the impact and outcomes of stakeholder engagement in their planning efforts?

### **Significance of the Study**

The study addresses stakeholder engagement in strategic planning, a critical aspect of higher education management. The research aims to provide valuable insights for administrators and planners seeking to improve stakeholder experiences through collaboration and inclusivity, leading to more robust and successful stakeholder engagement strategies. Effective stakeholder engagement is essential to develop strategic plans reflecting the needs and aspirations of the academic community. Involving stakeholders from the onset of planning ensures that these plans are comprehensive, inclusive, and effective. This study seeks to provide insights and strategies that can aid institutions in achieving their goals to enhance strategic planning efforts.

Despite extensive research on the importance of stakeholder engagement during strategic planning initiatives, significant gaps in the literature warrant further exploration. Notably, more robust quantitative models, longitudinal studies, and comparative studies are needed. Crocco et al. (2022) created an analysis of the methodology and data analytics used to evaluate stakeholder engagement in higher education. Despite an extensive evaluation, Crocco et al. (2022) discovered several gaps within the existing literature, including the need for a comprehensive model integrating engagement with institutional performance. Addressing these gaps could

provide valuable insights and tools for HEIs to refine and align strategic planning processes, mainly through enhanced digital engagement and sustainability methods. Integrating research findings could also lead to more adaptable and responsive educational environments. Refining these processes may encourage more sustainability in institutional growth and the development approach. Lastly, enhanced stakeholder engagement can contribute to the transparency and inclusivity of the strategic planning process, increasing trust and cooperation across the institution (Harrison & Wicks, 2019).

Quantitative metrics are needed to measure stakeholder engagement to enhance effectiveness and applicability. According to Kujala et al. (2022), the literature regarding developing quantitative models to measure stakeholder engagement is limited. However, these metrics could enable institutions to assess the direct impact of engagement strategies on strategic outcomes, allowing for more targeted improvements and facilitating more data-driven decision-making. The metrics could also provide a benchmark to compare the performance of different departments or facilities within the same institution. Benchmarks support the identification of best practices and ways to increase the effectiveness of engagement strategies. The implementation of these metrics could eventually lead to the development of performance indications universally applicable across HEIs, fostering a more standardized approach to measure engagement success. Establishing these models could stimulate further research, encouraging continuous improvement in strategic planning methodologies.

Longitudinal studies that can trace the long-term outcomes of strategic initiatives and how measurements of stakeholder engagement impact these initiatives are essential to validate the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement over time (Mednick et al., 1984). Such studies help identify which practices contribute to sustained institutional success and which may require

modifications. Longitudinal research also enables institutions to track changes in stakeholder perceptions and satisfaction over time, providing a dynamic view of the impacts of stakeholder engagement (Mednick et al., 1984). These insights could be crucial to adjust strategies, allowing institutions to become more agile in their strategic approaches. Longitudinal studies also offer the potential to examine the evolution of stakeholder engagement under varying conditions.

Furthermore, comparative studies across different educational systems must be more extensive and expand the understanding of contextual influences on stakeholders involved in strategic planning processes. Expanding research to include multiple educational contexts could reveal diverse challenges and successful strategies, offering a more global perspective on strategic planning in higher education. Comparative studies may assist in the delineation of cultural and systemic differences that influence stakeholder engagement effectiveness, guiding the development of more culturally sensitive practices (Bray et al., 2014). In addition, comparative analysis could foster more collaboration to enhance even the best stakeholder engagement practices in HEIs. By examining various educational systems, researchers can develop a framework accommodating a range of institutional types and sizes, promoting more effective and scalable approaches.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

- *Adaptation*: The process of adjusting policies and strategies in response to the institution's changing needs and external environment (Hinton, 2012)
- *Continuous Improvement*: An ongoing effort to enhance products, services, or processes through incremental improvements (Slykhuis, 2019)
- *Engagement*: The involvement of stakeholders in the strategic planning process, ensuring their perspectives and inputs are considered (Iglesias, 2015)

- *Evaluation*: The systematic assessment of the planning process to determine its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement (Booth, 2017)
- *Higher Education Institution (HEI)*: An organization that provides learning opportunities beyond high school, including colleges and universities (Flanders, 2020)
- *Implementation*: The action phase where strategic plans are executed according to agreed-upon timelines and objectives (Langrafe et al., 2020)
- *Strategic planning*: The process by which HEIs set goals and develop strategies to achieve them over a specified period (Booth, 2017)
- *Stakeholder*: An individual or group that has an interest or is impacted by the outcomes of the strategic planning process (Falqueto et al., 2020)
- *Transparency*: The practice of ensuring stakeholders can access information required to understand and participate in the strategic planning process (Booth, 2017)

## **Summary**

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements, shifting demographics, and increasing societal expectations, the role of stakeholder engagement in higher education is more critical than ever. Effective stakeholder engagement ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment among stakeholders. An inclusive approach enriches the planning process and enhances the likelihood of successful implementation. Institutions can build stronger relationships and foster a sense of shared responsibility by actively engaging stakeholders.

An inclusive approach aligns institutional goals with the needs and expectations of the community, leading to more comprehensive and well-informed strategic decisions. Institutions

must actively involve stakeholders from the inception of the planning process through various stages to create a more transparent and accountable environment. Higher education institutions can build stronger relationships and foster a sense of shared responsibility by ensuring stakeholders have a voice in the decision-making process.

This research is particularly relevant in light of recent trends, highlighting the challenges and opportunities associated with stakeholder engagement. The trends underscore the need for strategic plans responsive to stakeholders' evolving needs. Ultimately, this study explores stakeholder engagement to enhance the inclusivity, transparency, and effectiveness of strategic planning in higher education. This research seeks to provide valuable insights to help institutions navigate the complexities of stakeholder engagement.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

As a systematic process to envision a desired future and translate this vision into goals and objectives, strategic planning is pivotal in higher education (Allison & Kaye, 2015). The importance of strategic planning in higher education has garnered increasing attention due to its critical role in guiding institutions through rapidly changing educational landscapes (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). The strategic planning process enables institutions to proactively shape their educational offerings and administrative strategies in alignment with the long-term mission, vision, and goals.

As institutions become part of the global marketplace, the changing educational landscape must be addressed, including technological advancements, shifting demographics, and evolving needs (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Institutions must adapt to these dynamic conditions to remain competitive and relevant. Thus, the role of strategic planning in higher education has become more critical. Strategic foresight enables higher education institutions (HEIs) to stay ahead of potential challenges and to leverage opportunities arising from these challenges, ensuring adaptability in a rapidly changing educational climate (Munck & McConnell, 2009).

Strategic planning is not only about setting long-term goals, but also about creating a roadmap to navigate the complexities of the environment. Strategic planning helps to identify the steps necessary to bridge the gaps between the assessment of the institution's current state and its envisioned state. In addition to a thorough assessment, the process necessitates involving various stakeholders. Through a collaborative approach, strategic planning fosters a shared sense of purpose and direction crucial to achieving sustained success and resilience.

## **Strategic Planning**

The strategic planning process is a multifaceted approach that involves engaging stakeholders, completing an environmental scan, and creating key deliverables for the institution (Booth, 2017). The process begins with stakeholder engagement, which entails gathering input from students, faculty, staff, alums, community members, and governance structures. An environmental scan follows, analyzing internal and external factors that could impact the institution (Booth, 2017). Based on the analysis, institutions create key deliverables such as a vision, mission statement, strategic goals, and actionable plans. These deliverables serve as a roadmap that ideally guides the institution in adapting to changes and achieving its long-term objectives.

The vision statement should articulate the long-term aspirations and is often combined with a mission statement defining the core purpose and values (Booth, 2017). These statements together comprise a framework to establish strategic goals and objectives aligning with the institution's overall direction. Strategic planning also requires a deep understanding of the institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) to create a realistic and achievable plan (Booth, 2017). The initial analysis is crucial because it grounds the development of a comprehensive strategic plan addressing the institution's unique challenges and opportunities (Booth, 2017).

Strategic planning in higher education should be more than a procedural exercise, although it is often treated as a symbolic undertaking (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Strategic planning enables a framework, helping institutions adapt to changes, address challenges, and incrementally advance toward goals. The dynamic nature of strategic planning helps to ensure that the institution stays relevant and achieves sustained success over time (Strike, 2018).

Strategic planning integrates forecasting, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement to create a cohesive strategy that aligns with current and future educational needs (Baker & Taylor, 2007). As the educational landscape evolves, institutions must be proactive in their strategic approaches to navigate these complexities effectively. Not only do institutions need to adapt to immediate changes but must also anticipate future challenges and opportunities (Bryson, 2018). Ideally, the strategic planning process becomes a continuous cycle of evaluation, adaptation, and implementation (Hinton, 2012).

Strategic planning encourages a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, critical in responding to the rapid pace of change (Slykhuis, 2019). The experience of the Ahfad University for Women in Sudan exemplifies the practical application of strategic planning when integrated with continuous improvement and quality assurance (El Zein Badawi, 2020). The quality assurance process included a self-assessment, external evaluation, and continuous feedback integration, central to the maintenance of educational standards in Sudan's rapidly changing landscape (El Zein Badawi, 2020). Moreover, the strategic planning at Ahfad University was characterized by inclusiveness and the involvement of various stakeholders from its inception. The approach not only enhances the legitimacy of the strategic plan, but also ensures that it adapts to future challenges, with the broader goal of societal development and women's empowerment (El Zein Badawi, 2020).

As Ahfad University demonstrates, effective strategic planning promotes stakeholder collaboration across the institution, community, and external partners to enhance educational offerings and student outcomes (El Zein Badawi, 2020; Pritchard, 2017). This collaborative effort also supports the alignment of institutional goals with evolving industry standards and needs, ensuring educational programs remain relevant and effective. Moreover, the strategic



planning processes often stimulates new initiatives and partnerships able to provide additional institutional resources (David, 2016). Engaging stakeholders in system analysis, vision and goal articulation, action planning, and implementation helps to build trust and ownership within an everchanging educational landscape (Frantzen, 2018).

The role of stakeholder engagement is particularly critical in HEI strategic planning. As strategic planning continually adjusts to address present and forthcoming challenges, the spotlight increasingly turns towards stakeholders directly involved in or impacted by these plans. Stakeholders are pivotal in strategic planning, which explains why such plans exist. Stakeholders must be at the forefront of the strategic planning process for plans to be created and implemented (Snyder, 2015). The insights and feedback of stakeholders crucially shape the strategic direction and ensure that plans are responsive to stakeholder needs (Falqueto et al., 2020).

### **Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder theory is a business management framework emphasizing an organization's relationships and responsibilities towards its stakeholders rather than corporate shareholders. Stakeholder theory was first introduced by R. Edward Freeman (1984) in his work *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* and the theory has profoundly influenced the practices concerning stakeholder management in strategic planning. Stakeholder theory underscores the importance of identifying and engaging stakeholders in a manner that aligns their interests with institutional goals, suggesting that the success of an institution hinges on the effective management and satisfaction of key stakeholders (Freeman, 1984).

The practical applications of stakeholder theory impacts strategic planning in corporate environments and nonprofits, including higher education. Institutions that adopt stakeholder theory share knowledge, foster trust, and involve decision-making processes. Enhanced

stakeholder relationships tend to increase institutional loyalty and enhance value. For example, Langrafe et al. (2020) explored the application of stakeholder theory in HEIs in Brazil, aiming to determine whether improved relationships between institutions and stakeholders would enhance value. Utilizing a survey of 88 HEI leaders, the study confirmed that adhering to stakeholder theory principles significantly contributes to value creation in HEIs. Furthermore, the study's findings demonstrate several practical implications of stakeholder theory's application in HEIs, including improved stakeholder relationships, social contributions, and value (Langrafe et al., 2020).

Critics argue that stakeholder theory can dilute leadership focus by simultaneously attempting to serve many interests (Jensen, 2000). According to Jensen (2000), the lack of clear metrics, such as shareholder value, complicates leadership's ability to make practical tradeoffs when faced with conflicting stakeholder demands. However, proponents counter this criticism by highlighting an emphasis on stakeholder integration which fosters more adaptable and resilient organizations (Cocuccioni et al., 2022). Cocuccioni et al. (2022) found that the participatory process fosters collaboration between diverse stakeholders, facilitating information exchange and innovative solutions to complex challenges.

Stakeholder theory suggests an institutional success depends on the effective management and satisfaction of key stakeholders. According to Touqeer et al. (2019), this theory is particularly in higher education, where multiple groups have vested interests. Identifying and analyzing the stakeholders is essential to understand their influence, expectations, and potential impact on strategic outcomes. Stakeholder theory asserts that identifying and analyzing stakeholders is essential to understanding their influence, expectations, and potential impact on

strategic outcomes (Freeman, 1984). Recent developments in stakeholder theory integrate sustainability, linking the framework to long-term goals.

Stakeholder theory has evolved from a theoretical concept to a cornerstone of strategic management, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder engagement in achieving long-term success. In addition, new tools have been developed, including feasibility studies, which seek to understand whether the resources are available to complete the strategic plan's goals. The data shows that feasibility studies, particularly those that include stakeholder metrics, helps institutions gain valuable knowledge about their organization to determine the resources required for a strategic planning effort (National Research Council, 1999). A lack of commitment from stakeholders may result in strategic planning failure (Candido & Santos, 2019). Thus, stakeholders must be identified and funding for the strategic planning process must be considered (Ballard, 2018).

Stakeholder theory seeks to manage expectations and integrates various groups' diverse interests into the institutional culture (Harrison & Wicks, 2019). Stakeholder theory encourages institutions to consider the broader impact of their decisions concerning the community and environment (Phillips, 2011). Stakeholder engagement is not merely a strategic tool, but a critical component of institutional responsibility. Stakeholder theory demands a proactive approach to management where leaders are not only reactive to changes but also anticipate stakeholder needs and expectations (Andriof et al., 2017.) This collaborative approach allows for a more comprehensive organizational undertaking, resulting in more informed decision-making. As institutions recognize the value of stakeholder theory, systems are often implemented to manage and monitor stakeholder relations. Monitoring systems often include data analytics and stakeholder mapping tools that aid in the prediction of trends (Andriof et al., 2017).

The adaptability of stakeholder theory is among its most compelling attributes, making the theory applicable in various industries and sectors. The versatility of stakeholder theory is crucial for industries, including technology and healthcare, as well as higher education. Business contexts and public policy have applied stakeholder theory, recognizing that understanding the needs and influences of various stakeholder groups is crucial for effective governance (Schaltegger et al., 2019). The international adoption of stakeholder theory principles demonstrates universal appeal and effectiveness as global markets become more interconnected (Andriof et al., 2017). The ongoing evolution of stakeholder theory ensures its continued relevance in managing modern organizational challenges.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement is critical in strategic planning efforts within higher education institutions, and it is the foundation for securing the human investment needed to ensure the success of strategic plans. Stakeholder engagement is increasingly recognized as a critical component of strategic planning within HEIs. Research highlights the role of the human factor in strategic planning, as the process is fundamentally driven by people (Delprino, 2013). The emphasis acknowledges that effective planning relies on the participation and commitment of all stakeholders. Thus, understanding the human dimensions of a strategic planning process is a paramount consideration that should be addressed early in the strategic planning activity.

Furthermore, stakeholders facilitate the human commitment necessary to realize institutional goals (Delprino, 2013). By actively involving stakeholders and acknowledging the importance of the human element, institutions can craft strategic plans that are both visionary and rooted in community values and aspirations. This approach aligns the strategic objectives with the stakeholders' expectations and enhances the implementation of these plans. While there

are some unique challenges for stakeholder engagement in strategic planning, the overall importance of the approach positions institutions to thrive in an evolving educational landscape while fostering a sense of shared ownership and commitment among stakeholders (Roeder, 2013). The perceptions and engagement of faculty, staff, and students drive a strategic planning effort, irrespective of the methods and tools utilized for planning. The input of these groups shapes the institution's strategies. Furthermore, engaging these groups leads to more informed, innovative, and creative decision-making (Delprino, 2013). Stakeholder involvement ensures that the planning process is inclusive and reflects the institution and community.

Engaging stakeholders positions institutions to thrive in an evolving educational landscape while fostering a sense of shared ownership and commitment among stakeholders (Falqueto et al., 2020). Effective stakeholder engagement also involves the strategic management of relationships and potential conflicts. The significance of nurturing relationships with stakeholders in strategic planning emphasizes the need to define stakeholders, resolve potential conflicts of interest, and harness support to drive the institution's mission (Falqueto et al., 2020). The strategic emphasis on keeping stakeholders at the forefront of planning activities ensures that the institution remains adaptive and responsive to internal and external challenges, securing the institution's future in the competitive educational landscape.

Engagement with stakeholders focuses on genuinely engaging them to align with their interests and energies within the institutions' strategic goals, not merely involving more individuals and groups in the planning process (Falqueto et al., 2020). The literature highlights critical elements of successful stakeholder engagement in HEI strategic planning efforts, including clearly defining and understanding the stakeholders, the relationship between stakeholder engagement and the success of strategic initiatives, the identification of challenges

and considerations that may arise during engagement efforts, and best practices for effective engagement (Falqueto et al., 2020; Snyder, 2015). Additionally, the literature indicates gaps that provide opportunities for future research and improvement in stakeholder engagement strategies.

A study comparing the strategic planning success of two local governments demonstrated that overall success was primarily based on high participation and implementation. In contrast, failure was directly tied to a lack of participation, collaboration, and limited attainment (Iglesias, 2015). The data showed that even small attainment measures helped perpetuate the initiative, and engagement continued as the stakeholders began to witness some results coming to fruition. Thus, a framework with incremental results may help provide more rapid results to continue engaging participants, who can begin to realize the plan (Bouchereau, 2016). In the Iglesias study, stakeholder engagement emerged as a core element of strategic planning, as it directly influences the effectiveness and success of strategic plans.

### ***Engagement Strategies***

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for the success of HEI's strategic planning efforts. Engagement entails identifying and understanding various stakeholder groups and ensuring their involvement through planning. Then, strategies and techniques are applied to maximize engagement throughout the process. As Touqeer et al. (2019) discuss, effective engagement involves a mix of traditional and innovative techniques, such as targeted communications, stakeholder-specific advisory committees, and regular inclusion in strategic planning phases.

In higher education, effective stakeholder engagement often includes building mutual trust, exchanging information, and incorporating feedback into strategic plans. The process of engaging stakeholders fosters a collaborative environment. Research by Freeman et al. (2007)

underscores that the survival and success of organizations depend significantly on managing relationships and the expectations of key stakeholders. Consequently, HEIs must prioritize understanding their stakeholders' needs and aligning them with long-term strategic goals to foster success.

Engagement strategies can include target communications, stakeholder-specific advisory committees, and regular involvement in the strategic planning phases to ensure that all voices are heard (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Research demonstrates that an organization's survival and success hinge on effective management of key stakeholder groups' relationships and demands (Freeman et al., 2007). Thus, HEIs must identify and understand their stakeholders and prioritize and balance their desires to align with long-term strategic objectives.

Illich and Herwick (2020) highlight several effective engagement strategies enhancing stakeholder involvement in strategic planning, emphasizing the creation of a positive, reflective, inclusive, and transparent institutional climate fostering a sense of ownership and commitment. Illich and Herwick (2020) identify the implementation of frequently discussed, ambitious, specifically measured, transparent (FAST) goals as a critical strategy to inspire and collaborate with stakeholders, as opposed to specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound (SMART) goals. Adopting new departmental mission action plan (MAP) processes that incorporate FAST goals enabled direct connection of departmental strategies with the institutional mission, simplifying planning and increasing engagement (Illich & Herwick, 2020).

In addition, HEIs are turning to advanced communication tools that leverage digital platforms for timely and widespread interactions, allowing stakeholders to provide feedback and stay updated on institutional developments (Alenezi, 2023; Illich & Herwick, 2020). Transparent reporting through technology, regular training sessions, and comprehensive communication

campaigns ensures stakeholders are well-informed and actively participate in the process. Ilich and Herwick (2020) ultimately demonstrated the effectiveness and preference for new engagement strategies through high satisfaction, as reflected in their survey results.

Regularly hosting events like town halls, forums, and workshops to offer physical space for in-person interaction helps to promote open dialogue. Interactions in such contexts allow stakeholders to express views, concerns, and suggestions. Regular stakeholder interactions are essential to foster community and engagement (Montgomery, 2023). Furthermore, these events serve as a platform for stakeholders to connect personally, facilitating trust-building and mutual understanding (Hinton, 2012). When people converge in a shared space, they are more likely to cultivate empathy and respect for one another, leading to more collaborative relationships (Montgomery, 2023).

Additionally, stakeholder mapping and analysis are critical in identifying different groups' interests and impact levels, guiding institutions to create customized strategies (Chapleo & Simms, 2010). Institutions can understand the stakeholder landscape by identifying and categorizing different groups based on their interests and impact levels (Hinton, 2012). Once the stakeholder landscape is well understood, institutions can develop strategies tailored to address specific concerns and to leverage opportunities for collaboration. To foster meaningful and sustained stakeholder engagement, institutions must employ a multifaceted approach with effective feedback mechanisms.

Establishing effective feedback loops is vital, because it enables stakeholders to see the impact of their contributions and to enhance their connection and commitment to the institution's success. HEIs must also focus on capacity building for stakeholders to equip them with essential engagement skills, such as negotiation and conflict resolution, to ensure that all parties are



prepared for constructive engagement (Diers-Lawson, 2020). Developing a long-term engagement plan with clear objectives and review mechanisms is essential to maintain momentum and to adapt strategies to meet evolving needs. By implementing comprehensive engagement techniques, HEIs can ensure robust stakeholder involvement that aligns with stakeholder expectations.

### ***Cultivating Ownership and Commitment***

Successful stakeholder engagement transcends participation and cultivates ownership and commitment among stakeholders, fostering strong support for the institution's overarching strategic planning objectives (Delprino, 2013). This transformative approach shifts stakeholders from passive observers and recipients into active participants deeply invested in the planning process's outcomes. Ownership among stakeholders is particularly vital, as it encourages stakeholders to take responsibility for the plan's successful implementation. When stakeholders feel a sense of ownership, they are more inclined to provide valuable insights and resources that enhance strategic planning efforts (Falqueto et al., 2020). Engagement of this nature builds a robust foundation for the institution because the goals and interests of those it serves are aligned, which increases the likelihood of sustained success and impact (Bryson, 2018).

Moreover, genuine commitment from stakeholders ensures continued engagement throughout the lifecycle of the strategic plan. Genuine commitment involves stakeholders being actively involved and dedicated to the plan's success. The data demonstrates that enduring involvement helps the institution ensure successful implementation (Langrafe et al., 2020). The committed engagement of stakeholders enriches implementation and fortifies the organization's capacity to reach long-term goals effectively (Gunawardhana & Gamage, 2022). Furthermore, identifying key stakeholders and then engaging them aids in overall plan trajectories (Wamsler,

2017). Actively engaged participants help to ensure outcomes are measurable and function alongside existing governance and organizational arrangements (Akompab et al., 2013).

Institutions can cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment through regular updates and inclusive feedback mechanisms making stakeholders feel valued and respected. Transparent communication and recognition of stakeholder contributions reinforce their importance to the institution. University leadership should promote and develop strategies focused on stakeholders and imitate the behaviors they would like fostered among stakeholder groups (Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2016). The integration of stakeholder engagement strategies that promote ownership and commitment can also transform the institutional landscape. HEIs can achieve a more collaborative, responsive, and sustainable path to success by ensuring stakeholders are cocreators of the strategic vision. The alignment between institutional goals and stakeholder ownership underpins the effectiveness of strategic planning efforts.

### ***Building a Culture of Continuous Improvement***

Building a culture of continuous improvement is essential to sustain effective strategic plans in higher education. This culture emphasizes the ongoing refinement of processes, practices, and outcomes to adapt to new challenges and opportunities. Institutional leadership support is essential, and leaders must demonstrate commitment to improve continuously by championing the importance of regular evaluations and adaptations (Slykhuis, 2019). Investing in professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, and students ensures they have the skills and knowledge necessary to help continuously improve strategic planning activities. Training in data analysis, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement can enhance the institution's overall improvement capacity (Bryson, 2018). Encouraging cross-departmental collaboration promotes the sharing of best practices and innovative ideas, which can be further

enriched through active stakeholder participation. Interdisciplinary teams, including external stakeholders, can bring fresh perspectives to problem-solving and help drive continuous improvement initiatives (Slykhuis, 2019).

Regular review cycles ensure progress is monitored and adjustments are made as needed. Reviews should be data-informed and involve key stakeholders to maintain alignment with institutional goals (Hinton, 2012). Recognizing and rewarding contributions to continuous improvement helps motivate stakeholders and reinforces the importance of these efforts. Awards, public acknowledgments and professional development opportunities can incentivize participation and commitment from both internal and external stakeholders (Kotter, 2012). Institutions must prioritize creating a supportive environment where feedback is actively sought and valued to build a culture of continuous improvement. Research indicates that fostering a culture of open communication can significantly enhance continuous improvement efforts (Gavin, 2000). Institutions should implement mechanisms to regularly collect and analyze feedback from stakeholders to identify areas for improvement and to track the impact of implemented changes.

Active stakeholder engagement enriches the planning process and ensures that the institution's strategies reflect the broader community's needs and aspirations, driving more meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Ensuring strategic plans have built-in flexibility allows an institution to respond to changing circumstances, which is crucial to navigate uncertainties while ensuring that the plans remain relevant (Hinton, 2012). Coupling adaptability with effective stakeholder involvement creates a robust foundation to understand the complexities of stakeholder dynamics in higher education strategic planning.

## **Understanding Stakeholder Dynamics**

Strategic planning in higher education is a sophisticated process requiring coordinated efforts from numerous parties, each with distinct roles and responsibilities. The primary roles engaged in the strategic planning process can be divided into two main categories: leadership and stakeholders. Both groups play distinct but interdependent roles in creating and implementing strategic plans that align with the institution's goals (Strike, 2018). Leadership sets the strategic direction and ensures it integrates with the institution's mission, vision, and values (Strike, 2018). Stakeholders shape strategic priorities and ensure the plans address real-world needs. The collaboration between leadership and stakeholders fosters an inclusive planning process.

The effectiveness of strategic planning in higher education largely depends on the dynamics between leaders and stakeholders. Leaders must create an environment that encourages active participation from all stakeholder groups, ensuring that the strategic direction resonates with all stakeholders. A collaborative atmosphere is vital for successfully integrating strategic planning as it facilitates alignment between the institution's goals and the diverse expectations of stakeholders (Strike, 2018). Creating a strategic framework that is both visionary and practical requires a concerted effort from both leadership and stakeholders. Research demonstrates that to achieve a systematic method for developing strategic plans, the organization must first identify stakeholders, explore their impact, and develop stakeholder management strategies (Ackermann & Eden, 2011).

### ***Defining Leadership***

Leadership encompasses university administration, including presidents, provosts, deans, and vice presidents, who are pivotal in establishing the institution's vision and strategic direction. Leaders are instrumental in setting the vision, ensuring resource allocation, and

fostering an inclusive atmosphere conducive to active stakeholder participation (Taylor & Machado, 2006). Moreover, leaders provide clear direction and support throughout the strategic planning process, ensuring goals are met while fostering collaboration (Detterman et al., 2019). Leaders direct the strategic course and engage with stakeholders to align institutional goals with stakeholder needs.

Strategic planning success within HEIs depends largely on explicit leadership support and the allocation of appropriate resources to complete the effort. Research findings consistently underscore these two critical components as indispensable for achieving strategic planning objectives (Rumbley et al., 2014). Leaders must foster an atmosphere where stakeholder input is actively sought, ensuring the planning is collaborative and representative of the institutional community (Detterman et al., 2019). Leaders ensure that strategic planning moves from procedural to dynamic processes propelling the institution toward its educational mission by committing to robust engagement efforts.

### ***Defining Stakeholders***

Stakeholders form the foundation for securing the human commitment necessary to drive the realization of institutional goals (Delprino, 2013). Institutions can craft strategic plans that are not only visionary but rooted in the values and aspirations of their community by actively involving stakeholders and acknowledging the importance of the human element (Delprino, 2013). Research has shown that understanding the human side of strategic planning is essential since creating actual change is a people process (Delprino, 2013). The perceptions and engagement of faculty, staff, and students drive a strategic planning effort, regardless of the methods utilized for planning. Furthermore, HEIs should address the human side of strategic

planning as part of the core focus on advancing the institutional knowledge of stakeholders (Delprino, 2013).

Bryson (2018) highlights that the effectiveness of strategic initiatives is deeply connected to the clarity with which stakeholders are identified and engaged. Stakeholders in HEIs typically include a broad spectrum of internal and external participants, including but not limited to students, faculty, staff, alums, governance bodies, and the community. Each group holds unique interests and exerts varying degrees of influence on the institution's strategic direction.

There is a foundational need to define and understand stakeholders within HEI strategic planning. The literature explores these diverse groups' nuances, similarities, and differences. Each group's unique interests and influences require a multifaceted approach to engagement (Bryson, 2018). For example, faculty members involved in the institution's academic aspect often prioritize research, academic freedom, and curriculum development. In contrast, a community member may focus more on the institution's contribution to economic development and how the institution engages with local issues and needs. Thus, leadership and strategic planners must employ various engagement techniques tailored to different stakeholder groups to address these diverse needs.

**Internal Stakeholders.** HEIs are complex and deeply influenced by various internal stakeholders, such as students, faculty, and staff. Each internal stakeholder group shapes the institution. Fostering a collaborative strategic planning process that includes students, faculty, and staff both promotes a more inclusive and transparent organizational culture and leverages the unique insights of each group (Falqueto et al., 2020). This approach to stakeholder engagement enriches the planning process and solidifies institutional commitment to its core members.

As the primary recipients of educational services, students have varied needs as stakeholders, ranging from academic programs to activities that develop social and professional skills (Gulley, 2023). Understanding and engaging students in strategic planning improves key educational outcomes, such as retention and effectiveness. Faculty are essential to deliver quality education, and their involvement in strategic planning is indispensable in maintaining high academic standards and aligning academic programs with evolving industry requirements (Gappa et al., 2007). Likewise, staff are critical to achieving operational efficiencies and supporting student services. Engaging staff in strategic planning ensures operations align with the institution's educational goals and broader objectives (McCaffery, 2018). The research concerning each stakeholder's specific roles and contributions must be examined to understand how to engage each stakeholder group best.

***Students.*** Students are particularly pivotal among stakeholders, as they are both primary recipients of educational services and essential contributors to the institution. Students' needs and expectations vary widely, from academic programs and learning environments fostering intellectual and personal growth to extracurricular activities enhancing social and professional skills. Understanding student stakeholders involves recognizing their current needs and anticipating their future needs (Strydom et al., 2017).

Since the inception of strategic planning in higher education, students have only sometimes been identified as key stakeholders or potential customers. According to data from a UK study conducted in 1994, only three of the 83 organizations identified students as stakeholders in higher education (Conway et al., 1994). However, research conducted in the last 20 years has demonstrated that engaging students in strategic planning can lead to more tailored educational offerings and support services that align with their professional goals and job market

requirements (James, 2022). Furthermore, understanding and meeting student expectations can greatly benefit institutions, including increased engagement, retention, and learning (James, 2022). Involving students in these discussions can increase satisfaction rates and improve educational outcomes (Rowan & Grootenboer, 2017).

The importance of student stakeholders extends beyond educational outcomes. Rather, students' engagement in the strategic planning process can foster a sense of community and belonging, which is crucial for their overall experience (Masika & Jones, 2016). Students who feel heard and valued are more likely to be engaged as alumni after graduation and continue contributing to the institution. Therefore, HEIs must implement robust mechanisms for student involvement in strategic planning that ensure their voices are integrated into the decision-making process (Carey, 2018). Engaging students enriches the strategic planning and solidifies the institution's commitment to its core stakeholders.

Engaging students effectively in HEI strategic planning is critical for long-term success, as students provide fresh perspectives and insights. Including students not only aligns with best practices in strategic planning methodology concerning democratic values but also taps into diverse experiences and expectations, which leads to more comprehensive and effective strategic plans (Legacy, 2010). Effective engagement involves critical practices, including decision-making, communications, and feedback mechanisms (Trowler, 2010).

Involving students in decision-making provides insights that can lead to innovative educational policies and practices. The research demonstrates that student participation in governance and planning can enhance a sense of belonging and commitment to the institution (Trowler, 2010). Maintaining open channels of communication is an essential component of active student engagement. Updates about ongoing process changes help keep students informed,



foster transparency, mitigate misunderstandings, and build trust during strategic initiatives (Kezar, 2014). Research demonstrates that HEIs must also create ways to gather feedback and respond quickly to the received feedback (Bovill et al., 2011). Active solicitation and incorporating student feedback into strategic planning leads to more adaptive and student-centered environments.

In addition to the benefits for institutions, students benefit from engagement in strategic planning efforts because it encourages tangible skill development for student participants, such as leadership, critical thinking, and collaboration. These competencies are invaluable for students completing their academic studies and preparing for future careers. According to Trowler (2010), actively involving students in strategic initiatives leads to more meaningful learning experiences and promotes transferable skills.

Research demonstrates that when students are involved in curriculum development, the curriculum often becomes more aligned with student needs (Bovill et al., 2011). Student engagement reinforces the educational mission of HEIs by making students active contributors to their learning paths. This approach benefits their academic growth and promotes a collaborative atmosphere. These types of participatory approaches reinforce the overall educational mission of HEIs and highlight students' role in shaping their academic journey. Cook-Sather et al. (2014) expand on this point by highlighting how participatory practices in curriculum design can empower students and foster a more engaged student body.

**Faculty.** Engaging faculty members in the strategic planning process for HEIs is just as critical as involving students. Faculty shape the educational environment, centrally deliver student education, and mold the institution's climate (Falqueto et al., 2020). As the primary

educational content providers, faculty profoundly impact the quality of education and the institution's reputation.

Recognizing faculty as essential stakeholders hinges on understanding their professional demands, aspirations, and challenges (Gappa et al., 2007). Acknowledging faculty's diverse needs and contributions is fundamental to appreciating their unique role within an institution. In strategic planning, the engagement of faculty is indispensable to maintain high standards in academic programs and to ensure alignment with industry standards. This alignment is crucial to meet current educational needs and to anticipate future demands. Hénard (2010) emphasizes that understanding and supporting faculty professional demands can enhance their teaching effectiveness and work-life balance.

Faculty responsibilities are diverse and encompass various responsibilities, including curriculum development, research, service, advising, and community engagement. Therefore, their engagement is critical for faculty to work with students to develop academic policies and programs that reflect and embody the institution and increase student involvement (Gulley, 2023). Moreover, faculty members are integral to conducting research advancing knowledge in their fields. The research contributes to the academic community, enriches teaching material, and brings new developments into the classroom (Prince et al., 2007).

Including faculty in strategic planning fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to institutional goals, leading to increased job satisfaction. Bolman and Deal (2017) highlight that when faculty members feel their input is valued in shaping the institution's direction, their inclination to support strategic initiatives increases. Additionally, the faculty's direct interaction with students provides them unique insights, invaluable in the strategic planning process.

Research underscores the significance of faculty participation in governance as a mechanism to foster a collaborative atmosphere within HEIs. Kezar and Maxey (2016) argue that, just like students, faculty must be integrated into the decision-making process and receive clear and transparent communication to sustain engagement throughout the strategic planning process. Open communication channels are essential to maintaining faculty engagement during all phases of the strategic planning process.

Further extending these ideas, Tierney (2014) suggests that governance requires actively facilitating faculty contributions. By actively engaging faculty in discussions about institutional priorities, HEIs can leverage their experience and expertise to enhance the decision-making process. The approach enriches the development of strategies and strengthens the alignment between faculty expectations and institutional objectives.

Moreover, Falqueto et al. (2020) demonstrate that strategic planning efforts positively impact areas such as scientific research, which is critical to research institutions. By integrating faculty insights and expertise into strategic planning, institutions can align their academic and research initiatives more closely with long-term goals, enhancing institutional performance. Thus, faculty engagement in strategic planning is beneficial and essential for HEIs' holistic development and success.

**Staff.** Involving staff in the strategic planning process is critical to success, just as faculty involvement is critical. Staff members are key stakeholders who serve at the frontline of student services and are the backbone of operational efficiencies. Staff roles encompass various functions, from administrative support and facility management to student affairs and technology services (Blackwell & Blackmore, 2003). Each service directly impacts the institution's functionality and ability to deliver high-quality education.

Staff involvement in strategic planning ensures that operational strategies align with supporting educational goals and broader institutional objectives. The alignment is crucial for achieving excellence while meeting the institution's current and anticipated needs (Borders, 2019). As with faculty, staff participation in decision-making and planning enhances the understanding of institutional goals and improves performance and job satisfaction (McCaffery, 2018). As noted by Bolman and Deal (2017), when individuals feel that contributions are valued and have a stake in the outcome, commitment to the institution strengthens, leading to better outcomes.

Furthermore, staff members' unique insights are invaluable. Staff are often the first to identify bottlenecks or operational issues where student services could be improved. Including staff in the strategic planning process allows these insights to be harnessed, ensuring that plans are responsive (Allison & Kaye, 2015). By incorporating the practical knowledge and frontline experiences of staff, institutions can develop responsive and proactive strategies (Pritchard et al., 2016).

The literature demonstrates that there are some staff areas that are particularly important to engage during the strategic planning process: advancement offices and student affairs. Advancement offices, which include alumni relations, fundraising, and external engagement functions play a crucial role in strategic planning. Advancement offices work with alumni, donors, and corporate partners, and have a vested interest in the institution's success, providing valuable resources and feedback that influence institutional priorities (Croteau & Smith, 2012). Advancement professionals, by virtue of their close relationships with these groups, are uniquely positioned to provide insights into how external stakeholders perceive the institution's goals and can help align strategies with these perspectives. The involvement of advancement professionals

in strategic planning facilitates communication and alignment between internal and external stakeholders, helping to shape strategies both internally effective and resonating with the broader community (Croteau & Smith, 2012).

Additionally, student affairs offices are central to fostering student development, engagement, and success, making their involvement in strategic planning crucial for enhancing the overall student experience. These departments are responsive for areas such as student support services, mental health resources, residential life, and leadership development (McClellan et al., 2009). Student affairs professionals help to ensure that the student experience outside of the classroom is integrated with the academic mission of the institution by contributing to the strategic planning process. Research demonstrates that HEI strategic plans increasingly emphasize collaboration across campus departments, particularly among advancement offices and student affairs because they further the institution's overall vision (Rissmeyer, 2010).

Moreover, a collaborative strategic planning process that includes staff members fosters a more inclusive and transparent organizational culture. Inclusivity is essential to sustain engagement, crucial to the success of strategic initiatives (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018). Integrating staff perspectives helps create a more holistic approach to strategic planning that considers academic outcomes, operational efficiencies, and the services integral to achieving those outcomes (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). Staff inclusion in HEI strategic planning efforts is critical for success, ensuring that operational strategies align well with academic goals, that staff have job satisfaction, and that they leverage their unique insights to improve institutional effectiveness and performance. A strategic planning process including staff fosters a more collaborative, inclusive, and successful institution.

**External Stakeholders.** HEIs are shaped by those involved in their daily operations and a more comprehensive network of external stakeholders who contribute to the institution's success and sustainability. External stakeholders influence HEIs, each contributing to the institution's strategic direction, sustainability, and community (Falqueto et al., 2020). Engaging with local communities, including businesses, governmental entities, nonprofits, and the general public, is critical to develop a comprehensive institutional strategy reflecting the needs and priorities of the institution (Falqueto et al., 2020). The engagement of these stakeholders ensures that HEIs do not operate in silos but are responsive and contribute to the broader societal context (Magalhães et al., 2018). HEIs can leverage local insights and resources to enhance educational programs and community services by collaborating with these diverse community groups.

Additionally, HEIs rely on the support and guidance of alums, governing bodies, and accreditation agencies. Alums help to expand the institutions' reach and influence, bridging the gap between students and the professional world (Falqueto et al., 2020). Governing bodies provide strategic oversight, ensuring the institution remains aligned with its mission. Accreditation agencies ensure HEIs maintain the quality and credibility necessary to uphold public trust (Brittingham et al., 2008). Together, these stakeholders support institutional goals and ensure that operations meet the standards of accountability and excellence, which are critical for long-term success.

**Community.** Engaging the community in strategic planning is essential to achieve a well-rounded and successful institutional strategy. Community engagement encompasses collaboration with local businesses, governmental entities, nonprofits, and the general public (Hoy & Johnson, 2013). These external stakeholders can significantly impact the institution's operations and success, and by engaging them, institutions can gain diverse perspectives. Like

internal stakeholders, community members can contribute external insights that can improve strategies and insights.

Furthermore, extending the scope of the engagement to encompass the local community is instrumental to enhance the overall success of strategic plans. Community participation not only provides valuable external perspectives but also facilitates the alignment of institutional strategies with the broader needs and aspirations of the local area. Community members contribute unique perspectives and expertise, reflecting the institution's broader needs and expectations (Hoy & Johnson, 2013). Institutions must be able to respond rapidly to the external environment to remain relevant. Engaging community members as external stakeholders will help to ensure the strategic plans are externally feasible and align with the community's needs.

Active community participation can lead to more robust public support, essential for the institution's sustainability. Engagement and support are more robust when the community feels invested in the institution's mission, vision, and values. Community involvement in strategic planning ensures that the institution's strategies are comprehensive, considering internal and external capabilities (Hoy & Johnson, 2013). Community engagement enriches planning and fosters a more connected institution equipped to work with various external stakeholders.

***Alumni, Governing Bodies, and Accreditation Agencies.*** Beyond the local community are other external stakeholder groups. These groups include alums, governing bodies, and accreditation agencies. Each group influences HEIs differently, from reputation building to ensuring that the institution maintains academic standards. As former students, alums play a multifaceted role in HEIs and provide financial support and intangible benefits, such as network expansion, that enhance the student experience. Alums extend the institution's reach and influence through professional success and ongoing engagement (Schlesinger et al., 2017). The

professional success of alums attests the quality of education their alma mater provides. Alums serve as a crucial connector in the stakeholder network, bridging current students, faculty, and the professional world. Engagement with alums enhances the institution not only by providing financial support, but also by fostering relationships that expand the institution's influence.

Governing bodies within higher education, such as boards of trustees and regents, provide strategic direction and make decisions that impact the institution's future. These bodies comprise professionals in various fields who help steer the institution to achieving its long-term goals and objectives (Rettig, 2020). Their responsibilities include ensuring the institution's fiscal health and upholding academic standards, essential to maintaining integrity and excellence. Additionally, the role of governance involves decision-making that influences the institution's trajectory, shaping everything from academic programs to campus development and finances (Rettig, 2020).

Governance bodies influence institutional strategic plans, and according to Tierney (2014), changes in institutional strategies can have immediate effects on campus governance. These effects may manifest in modifying governance structures and new and revised policies. Although sometimes abrupt, such shifts help the institution better meet future challenges. Engagement in the strategic planning process is imperative for governing bodies, because their oversight helps maintain alignment between the institution's mission and the complexities of the modern educational landscape (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Accreditation agencies critically influence in higher education by setting and enforcing standards. Accreditation agencies ensure that institutions adhere to educational standards to maintain public trust and the value of academic credentials (Martinez, 2015). The engagement of accreditation agencies in strategic planning is critical, as their evaluations often drive



improvements in institutional policies and practices. Through oversight, these agencies encourage the continual assessment of academic programs and operational strategies to meet and exceed established standards (Martinez, 2015). The proactive engagement of accreditation bodies ensures that the institution remains focused on providing high-quality education responsive to students' needs.

While alums, governing bodies, and accreditation agencies each play critical roles in higher education, they are not the only stakeholders in HEIs. Industry partners, parents, policymakers, and nongovernmental organizations must be considered as part of the strategic planning process (Rybnicek & Königgruber, 2019). The engagement of these groups will largely depend on the institution's overarching strategic objectives. Collectively, these stakeholders contribute to institutions and offer guidance, support, and oversight to help secure the institution's reputation and effectiveness in fulfilling its mission.

### **Challenges of Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement in HEIs presents multiple obstacles and unique challenges. Some of these challenges necessitate proactive planning, including managing conflicts of interest, sustaining engagement over time, and other factors related to the complexities of the human elements of engagement. Despite these challenges, stakeholder engagement is critical to create an environment supportive of strategic planning. By examining these challenges, HEIs can better navigate the complexities of stakeholder engagement.

### ***Managing Conflicts of Interest***

Conflicts of interest represent a significant challenge in stakeholder engagement. When stakeholders have competing priorities or conflicting goals, tensions can hinder collaborative efforts (Falqueto et al., 2020). Managing these conflicts necessitates transparent communication

and establishing rules that guide how participants interact with one another. Additionally, institutions must develop mechanisms to identify and disclose conflicts of interest and mitigate their impact on the planning process. For example, regular disclosures and updates about potential conflicts can foster a culture of transparency and trust. Institutions may also benefit from appointing mediators to oversee discussions and ensure a fair representation of all interests (Bourne, 2016). Fostering an environment where stakeholder contributions align toward the collective success of the institution's strategic objectives can aid in this approach (Bourne, 2016). By addressing conflicts openly, HEIs can turn potential barriers into opportunities for deeper collaboration and mutual understanding.

### ***Sustaining Engagement***

Maintaining sustained engagement can be resource-intensive and challenging over long periods, especially without seeing immediate benefits (Touqeer et al., 2019). Institutions must develop strategies to help keep stakeholders interested and involved. Those strategies may include regular updates, decision-making participation, and continuous recognition of stakeholder contributions. For instance, periodic newsletters, progress reports, and interactive sessions can keep stakeholders informed and motivated (Bryson, 2018). Engaging stakeholders in meaningful roles within committees or task forces can also provide a sense of ownership and accountability. Institutions can build sustained engagement by consistently demonstrating the value of stakeholder input and the tangible impacts of their involvement.

### ***Other Factors***

Other known issues with stakeholder engagement and strategic planning include defining key performance indicators (KPIs,) reconciling diverse perspectives, and ensuring that all key areas are identified and included (Kujala et al., 2022). Defining KPIs poses a unique challenge

for stakeholders, primarily when representing diverse groups with distinct goals for their respective areas (Delprino, 2013). Establishing KPIs that reflect the varied interests and contributions of different stakeholder groups requires a collaborative and inclusive approach (Freeman et al., 2010).

In addition, the distinct perceptions among stakeholders can sometimes create obstacles in delineating planning activities. Effective stakeholder engagement requires balancing diverse interests, often complicating strategic planning efforts (Falqueto et al., 2020). Human factors play a critical role in these processes, yet they introduce complexities that standard planning models often struggle to accommodate (Delprino, 2013). Human factors encompass behaviors, expectations, and interactions, necessitating nuanced management strategies. By addressing these challenges with thoughtful strategies and robust frameworks, institutions can enhance the strategic planning process and achieve broad engagement, leading to more prosperous and inclusive outcomes.

### **P-20: Implications and Impacts**

Understanding the implications and impacts of stakeholder engagement in P-20 education can lead to improved educational continuity, data-informed decision-making, and increased equity and inclusion. Effective stakeholder engagement strategies in higher education strategic planning can bridge P-20 education segments. Research concerning stakeholders in education may foster the future alignment of proven strategic planning approaches. Effective stakeholder engagement is inherently data-driven, fostering a culture of data-informed decision-making within HEIs.

Research on stakeholder engagement in higher education highlights the potential for improved educational continuity. Studies suggest that when stakeholders such as educators,

parents, and community members are involved, there is greater alignment and coherence across educational stages from early childhood to higher education (Shewbridge & Köster, 2021). Stakeholder engagement supports design educational pathways that are less fragmented and more supportive of students' progression. This collaborative approach bridges gaps between educational levels and ensures that each transition builds on prior learning experiences. By engaging stakeholders in the design of transitional programs, schools can create tailored interventions to address learning gaps and promote a cohesive educational journey (Shewbridge & Köster, 2021).

Research on stakeholder engagement across educational sectors underscores the importance of a unified approach incorporating feedback and insights from diverse participants (Booth, 2017). Data-informed decision-making is another critical area where stakeholder engagement has shown a significant impact. When stakeholder insights shape educational policies and practices, the decisions reflect the educational community's real needs and challenges. Stakeholder feedback is demonstrably invaluable in identifying areas that require attention, leading to more targeted and effective solutions (Crocco et al., 2022). Furthermore, stakeholder engagement enables a more dynamic approach to education management, as decisions are continually refined based on ongoing input and analysis. The culture of data-driven decision-making can permeate P-20 education, encouraging schools at all levels to rely on stakeholder input to help guide their policies and practices. Stakeholder engagement also emphasizes equity and inclusion through the active involvement of diverse stakeholders. Institutions can better address equity and inclusion by realizing the insights from stakeholders from different backgrounds, demographics, and perspectives (Crocco et al., 2022).

### **Chapter III: Methods**

Higher education institutions, (HEIs) have faced unprecedented challenges in recent years due to rapid technological advancements, shifting demographics, and evolving societal expectations. These changes have necessitated reevaluating strategic plans formulated and implemented within institutions. As stakeholders play a crucial role in shaping the direction and success of HEIs, engagement in the strategic planning process is more critical than ever. Effective stakeholder engagement ensures that diverse perspectives are incorporated, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the institution's goals.

Despite the acknowledged importance of stakeholder engagement, the literature demonstrates that many HEIs need help involving stakeholders in strategic planning. Barriers such as communication gaps, a lack of transparency, and insufficient collaboration often hinder meaningful participation. This study aimed to explore these challenges and identify best practices for enhancing stakeholder engagement in higher education. The research gathered quantitative data on stakeholder's perceptions, experiences, and suggestions, offering actionable insights and strategies to improve the inclusivity and effectiveness of strategic planning efforts.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The study examined the intricacies of stakeholder engagement in higher education strategic planning and resulted in actionable insights and strategies that can help HEIs enhance their strategic planning efforts. The study focused on understanding how stakeholder engagement can enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of strategic planning. By drawing on stakeholder and participatory planning theories, the study sought to offer data that could enhance strategic planning frameworks and contribute to the body of knowledge on strategic planning in higher education by highlighting best practices and methodologies for effective stakeholder

engagement. The approach underscored the value of inclusive stakeholder processes in enhancing organizational performance and strategic outcomes, supported by research from Bryson (2018) and Harrison and Wicks (2009).

Furthermore, the study provided empirical evidence on the benefits of stakeholder engagement in strategic planning. By analyzing data from various HEI stakeholders, the research identified key factors contributing to successful engagement and how these factors could be replicated across different institutions. The study also sought to understand the challenges institutions face in engaging stakeholders and proposes practical solutions to overcome these barriers. The study offers valuable insights for higher education administrators and policymakers seeking to improve the strategic planning process.

### **Research Design**

The study employed a quantitative research design to explore the relationship between stakeholder engagement and strategic planning in HEIs. A quantitative approach was selected due to the ability to facilitate the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data, allowing for the identification of patterns, correlations, and causal relationships. This data collection method is ideal for testing hypotheses and drawing conclusions that can be generalized across larger populations. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted, quantitative methods are particularly effective in examining relationships between variables because they provide measurable evidence regarding the strength and significance of these relationships. The study assessed how varying levels of stakeholder engagement influenced the strategic planning process across various higher education institutions in the United States. The data-driven nature of the study ensured objectivity and reliability.

The research followed a non-experimental, correlational design. The study sought to understand the correlation between the degree of stakeholder engagement and the effectiveness of engagement, as well as perceived strategic plan effectiveness. The approach is appropriate for this study because it aimed to examine the relationships without manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A correlational design allowed for measuring the strength and direction of the relationship between these variables, providing insights into how different aspects of stakeholder engagement contributed to effectiveness.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions, which were designed to uncover critical aspects of stakeholder engagement in higher education strategic planning:

**RQ1.** What are the key challenges HEIs face in effectively engaging stakeholders in the strategic planning process?

**RQ2.** What factors impact stakeholder engagement in the strategic planning process?

**RQ3.** What tactics can be employed to address the challenges of stakeholder engagement in the planning process?

**RQ4.** How can HEIs measure the impact and outcomes of stakeholder engagement in their planning efforts?

### **Hypotheses**

The study focused on stakeholder engagement and the effectiveness of the planning process within HEIs. The research aimed to provide empirical evidence on the benefits of effective stakeholder engagement in strategic planning. The findings offer practical recommendations for higher education institutions seeking to enhance their strategic planning process by testing these hypotheses. The study tested the following hypotheses:

**H1.** Effective Stakeholder engagement, characterized by high levels of participation, collaboration, and transparency, leads to more successful strategic planning outcomes.

**H2.** Effective stakeholder engagement leads to more comprehensive, inclusive, and well-aligned strategic plans.

**H3.** Higher levels of stakeholder engagement are associated with improved satisfaction with the strategic planning process.

### **Alignment of Research Questions and Hypotheses**

1. **H1.** Effective stakeholder engagement leads to more successful strategic planning outcomes.
  - a. **RQ1.** Relates to the challenges in achieving effective engagement and strategic success.
  - b. **RQ2.** Explores factors that impact engagement levels.
  - c. **RQ4.** Directly measures the impact of engagement on strategic planning outcomes.
  
2. **H2.** Effective engagement leads to more comprehensive, inclusive, and well-aligned strategic plans
  - a. **RQ2.** Explores the factors impacting engagement, such as inclusion, transparency and diversity.
  - b. **RQ4.** Measures how effective engagement translates into well-aligned and inclusive strategic plans.
  
3. **H3.** Higher levels of stakeholder engagement are associated with improved satisfaction with the strategic planning process.



- a. **RQ3.** Explores the tactics that can be employed to improve engagement and overall satisfaction with the process.
- b. **RQ4.** Indirectly measures the success of engagement through improved satisfaction with the process.

### **Description of Population, Participants, and Sampling Procedures**

The population for this study consisted of various stakeholders from HEIs, including students, faculty, staff, administrators, alums, and community members. These stakeholders represent a diverse group with different perspectives, interests, and levels of influence on the strategic planning process. A purposive sampling method was employed, allowing for the deliberate selection of participants with roles or insights into the strategic planning process at their respective institutions (Raghunath, 2017).

The sampling procedure involved identifying key groups actively involved in or affected by strategic planning activities. The study focused on determining the appropriate inclusion criteria to ensure it captured a wide range of perspectives from stakeholders in the strategic planning process, including faculty, staff, students, and the community. The inclusion criteria also considered the institution type, including public and private universities, community colleges, and specialized institutions.

A professional service was utilized to screen and recruit participants to enhance the accuracy and reliability of participant selection. The service identified and verified potential participants, ensuring they met the study's inclusion criteria, and then contacted them for participation. In addition, participants were disqualified from the study if, upon selection, they had never been involved in strategic planning activities at their institution. This approach

enhanced the sample's representativeness and ensured the participants had relevant experience with strategic planning activities at their respective institutions.

Voluntary participation was the cornerstone of the study, and participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. The study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and well-being. Data was anonymized to maintain confidentiality, and numeric codes were used to identify participants. Personal identifiers have been removed from all data sets, and any published results will be presented as aggregated data or with numeric codes to prevent individual participants from being identified.

### **Description of Instruments**

A survey was used to collect quantitative data on stakeholder perceptions and experiences with the strategic planning process. Surveys are practical tools for gathering data from a large and diverse participant group and provide a broad overview of stakeholder engagement across institutions (Raghunath, 2017). The survey collected standardized information that was quantitatively analyzed to identify trends and patterns. The survey captured comprehensive data on stakeholder engagement practices, perceived barriers, and the outcomes of strategic planning efforts.

The survey included questions related to the frequency and quality of engagement, perceived barriers, and the impact of stakeholder involvement on strategic planning outcomes. Questions were designed to capture the breadth and depth of stakeholder experiences, with a mix of closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions for qualitative insights. Furthermore, the survey pinpointed specific areas for improving stakeholder engagement practices to boost the overall effectiveness of strategic planning.

The survey was administered through Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Dillman et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of designing a survey that maximizes response rates and data quality, which was considered as part of the study's survey design. The survey contained 20 questions, including mixed multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. The format allowed for data collection that captured quantitative data and qualitative insights.

### **Data Security**

The data collected for this study was securely stored in Qualtrics and behind two-factor authentication. Only the principal researcher and faculty supervisor had access to the data, maintaining strict confidentiality throughout the research process. No other individuals or external parties viewed or manipulated the data, ensuring the highest level of data integrity and participant privacy. Furthermore, all information was handled in compliance with institutional and ethical guidelines.

### **Statement of Researcher Positionality**

As a researcher involved in higher education and strategic planning, positionality is informed by both professional experience and academic background. The connection to the topic stems from years of working within academic institutions engaged in strategic planning activities and witnessing firsthand the challenges and opportunities associated with stakeholders in strategic planning and large system implementations. Recognizing the potential for biases, commitment to maintaining objectivity and rigor of the study is at the forefront. Awareness of these biases and professional commitment to improving the strategic planning process in higher education drove this research.

## **Chapter IV: Findings and Analysis**

### **Summary**

The survey was distributed to a panel of participants who met the initial selection criteria. Following distribution, 381 participants completed all or part of the survey. Of these participants, those who identified as faculty, staff, students, and administrators provided strong insights into the perceptions of stakeholder engagement and the effectiveness of the strategic planning process. The diversity of the respondents allowed for a comprehensive understanding of varying perspectives, and this input is crucial for identifying both common themes and unique concerns related to stakeholder engagement practices.

The data collected revealed a diverse range of responses regarding involvement, satisfaction, and the perceived impact of engagement practices. The key metrics, such as means and standard deviations, highlighted trends in stakeholder experiences, providing a foundational understanding of how these groups interacted in the strategic planning process and perceived the initiatives at their institutions. Advanced statistical analysis revealed deeper relationships among variables, uncovering factors that influenced stakeholder engagement. The data illuminated the current state of stakeholder perceptions and can be used to inform future strategies for enhancing engagement in the strategic planning process.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis for this study was conducted through quantitative methods to examine the relationship between stakeholder engagement and the effectiveness of the strategic planning process in higher education institutions. The process involved several stages, including data cleaning, descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and statistical techniques to test the hypotheses. The initial goal was to ensure that all collected data was accurate and suitable for

basic analysis, and then more sophisticated statistical methods were applied to provide an understanding of the complex dynamics at play.

The first step in data analysis was to clean and prepare the collected survey data. The process involved checking for missing data, outliers, and response inconsistencies. Any incomplete or invalid responses were removed to ensure the accuracy of the analysis. In addition, participants who had never been engaged in strategic planning and those who did not identify an association with an institution were removed. The data was then coded with the participant number and entered in the statistical software, SPSS, for further analysis. Once the data was prepared, initial frequency distributions were generated to provide an overview of the dataset.

### **Demographics**

Frequency distributions helped to categorize and summarize the key variable factors, including the primary role of participants, types of institutions, and years affiliated with the institution. The data in these three key areas provided insights into the demographics of the survey respondents, revealing the diversity of perspectives among these different populations. The analysis of the frequency distributions regarding primary roles resulted in response rates greater than 13% for each role type among internal stakeholders, including students, staff, administrators, and faculty. There was enough meaningful data to analyze the perspectives of internal populations. Unfortunately, response rates for external stakeholders were limited. Thus, this study did not result in meaningful data concerning the perspectives of external stakeholder groups, including alums, governance, and community members.

**Table 1***Primary Role of Participants*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Student	106	37.1	37.1
Faculty	39	13.6	50.7
Staff	62	21.7	72.4
Administrator	58	20.3	92.7
Alumni	13	4.5	97.2
Donor	3	1.0	98.3
Governance	5	1.7	100.0
Total	286	100.0	

The analysis of the frequency distributions regarding types of institutions provided context concerning the interpretation of stakeholder engagement perceptions. The data revealed a diverse mix of respondents from public, private, and community colleges. Understanding the distributions across the institution types is critical to the study due to the nature of stakeholder dynamics, institutional culture, and how stakeholder engagement practices are perceived and implemented. While the study was primarily comprised of stakeholders from public universities, there was more than 17% from each institution type.

**Table 2***Types of Institutions*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Public University	153	53.5	53.5
Private University	82	28.7	82.2
Community College	49	17.1	99.3
Other	2	.7	100.0
Total	286	100.0	

The analysis of the frequency distributions regarding years affiliated with the institution provided insights into the respondents' experience levels. The data indicated a range of affiliations, from those who had been with the institution for less than a year to those with over 15 years of experience. The diversity in tenure is important because it reflected varying perspectives on stakeholder engagement and the strategic planning processes.

**Table 3***Years Affiliated*

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 1 year	31	10.8	10.8
1-3 years	109	38.1	49.0
4-7 years	87	30.4	79.4
8-15 years	37	12.9	92.3
More than 15 years	22	7.7	100.0
Total	286	100.0	

Various inferential statistical techniques were employed to test the hypotheses, including multiple regression analysis and Pearson's correlation coefficient. Multiple regression analysis examined the predictive relationships between independent and dependent variables. The variables were input as independents to measure each specific impact on the dependent variable: the stakeholders' ratings of strategic planning success. The analysis controlled all confounding variables, ensuring the insights about the factors driving strategic planning are actionable.

### **Hypothesis 1**

Hypothesis 1 was that effective stakeholder engagement, characterized by high levels of participation, collaboration, and transparency, leads to more successful strategic planning outcomes. The correlation analysis conducted for this hypothesis looked at values for perceived overall success (Q16), transparency level (Q6), and diverse stakeholder perspectives (Q7). For these variables, Pearson's correlation was conducted. As shown in Table 4, transparency level and diverse stakeholder perspectives indicated a Pearson correlation of .509, a positive correlation. The significance level of transparency level and diverse stakeholder perspectives was less than .001, which indicated statistical significance. Transparency level and perceived overall success indicated a Pearson correlation of .335, a positive correlation. The significance level of transparency and perceived overall success was less than .001, indicating statistical significance. Diverse stakeholder perspectives and perceived overall success indicated a Pearson correlation of .275, a somewhat positive correlation. The significance level of diverse stakeholder perspectives and perceived overall success was less than .001, which indicated statistical significance. Pearson's correlation coefficient measured the strength and direction of the linear relations between the variables and identified correlations between stakeholder engagement practices and



perceived overall success. The data suggests that both transparency and the inclusion of diverse perspectives were positively related to the perceived success of strategic planning.

**Table 4**

*H1 Correlations*

		Transparency Level	Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives	Perceived Overall Success
Transparency Level	Pearson Correlation	1	.509**	.335**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	286	286	286
Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives	Pearson Correlation	.509**	1	.275**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	286	286	286
Perceived Overall Success	Pearson Correlation	.335**	.275**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	286	286	286

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Following correlation analysis, multiple regression was conducted for one dependent variable, perceived overall success (Q16), and two dependent variables: transparency level (Q6) and diverse stakeholder perspectives (Q7). The H1 model summary, as shown in Table 5 indicated a weak positive correlation ( $r=.283$ ). Further regression was conducted to examine H1 model coefficients, as shown in Table 6. While lack of transparency did not have an impact on the perceived overall success ( $sig .244$ ), diverse stakeholder perspectives are statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating a positive relationship with perceived overall success. This suggests that higher levels of diverse stakeholder perspectives are associated with higher perceived success.

**Table 5***H1 Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
H1	.283 <sup>a</sup>	.080	.074	.981

a. Predictors: (Constant), Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives, Lack of Transparency

**Table 6***Coefficients<sup>a</sup>*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
H1	(Constant)	2.607	.280		9.308	<.001
	Lack of Transparency	-.056	.048	-.067	-1.168	.244
	Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives	.321	.065	.286	4.956	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Overall Success

**Hypothesis 2**

Hypothesis 2 was that effective stakeholder engagement leads to more comprehensive, inclusive, and well-aligned strategic plans. The correlation analysis conducted for this hypothesis looked at the impact of stakeholder diversity planning (Q12), satisfaction with involvement (Q5), transparency level (Q6), diverse stakeholder perspectives (Q7,) effectiveness of communication (Q8), incorporation of feedback (Q9), and perceived overall success (Q16). As shown in Table 7, all dependent variables showed a positive correlation (.01). Satisfaction with involvement showed strong correlations with transparency level (.579), suggesting that higher transparency

and better communication can enhance satisfaction levels. Transparency level also strongly correlates with the effectiveness of communication (.581) and incorporation of feedback (.510), indicating that transparency is crucial for effective communication and feedback incorporation. Diverse stakeholder perspectives correlate with the effectiveness of communication (.547) and the impact of stakeholder diversity (.581), which highlights the importance of diversity in enhancing communication and stakeholder impact. The effectiveness of communication and incorporation of feedback are closely linked (.532), which suggests that communication helps to facilitate the incorporation of feedback. The impact of stakeholder diversity also correlates with the incorporation of feedback (.542), indicating the importance of diverse stakeholder engagement in the feedback process.

Correlation with perceived overall success was relatively low across all variables in a range of (.275-.335), indicating that these factors are interconnected and contribute to perceived overall success but are not as strong as the relationships between the other variables. However, the data underscores that these factors highlight the many dimensions of HEI's strategic planning success.

**Table 7***H2 Correlations*

		Satisfaction with Involvement	Transparency Level	Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives	Effectiveness of Comm.	Incorporation of Feedback	Impact of Stakeholder Diversity	Perceived Overall Success
Satisfaction with Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.588**	.461**	.579**	.422**	.387**	.312**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	286	286	286	286	286	286	286
Transparency Level	Pearson Correlation	.588**	1	.509**	.581**	.510**	.517**	.335**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	286	286	286	286	286	286	286
Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives	Pearson Correlation	.461**	.509**	1	.547**	.524**	.581**	.275**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	286	286	286	286	286	286	286
Effectiveness of Comm.	Pearson Correlation	.579**	.581**	.547**	1	.532**	.525**	.325**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	286	286	286	286	286	286	286
Incorporation of Feedback	Pearson Correlation	.422**	.510**	.524**	.532**	1	.542**	.323**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	286	286	286	286	286	286	286
Impact of Stakeholder Diversity	Pearson Correlation	.387**	.517**	.581**	.525**	.542**	1	.318**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	286	286	286	286	286	286	286
Perceived Overall Success	Pearson Correlation	.312**	.335**	.275**	.325**	.323**	.318**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	286	286	286	286	286	286	286

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Following correlation analysis, multiple regression was conducted for one dependent variable: the impact of stakeholder diversity planning (Q12) and six independent variables, satisfaction with involvement (Q5), transparency level (Q6), diverse stakeholder perspectives (Q7), effectiveness of communication (Q8), incorporation of feedback (Q9), and perceived overall success (Q16). The H2 model summary, as shown in Table 8, indicated a strong positive correlation ( $r=.681$ ). Further regression was conducted to examine H2 coefficients. As shown in Table 9, satisfaction with involvement ( $coef.= -.52, p=.332$ ) is not statistically significant. Transparency level shows a significant positive relationship ( $coef.=.176, p=.005$ ), indicating that higher transparency levels are associated with a greater perceived impact of stakeholder diversity. Diversity stakeholder perspectives show a strong positive impact ( $coef.= .303, p<.001$ ) that supports the hypothesis that diverse stakeholder perspectives are crucial for comprehensive and inclusive strategic plans. The effectiveness of communication ( $coef.= .145, p=.014$ ) is statistically significant, suggesting that effective communication enhances the impact of diverse stakeholder perspectives. The incorporation of feedback ( $coef.=.229, p<.001$ ) indicates a significant positive effect, aligning with the hypothesis that incorporating feedback is critical for inclusively engaging stakeholders. Perceived overall success ( $coef.=.068, p=.113$ ) is not statistically significant. Overarchingly, the model demonstrates that diverse stakeholder perspectives, transparency, effective communication, and incorporation of feedback are significant drivers of the impact of stakeholder diversity on strategic planning.

**Table 8***H2 Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				Sig. F Change
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	
H2	.681 <sup>a</sup>	.463	.452	.676	.463	40.131	6	279	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Overall Success, Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives, Satisfaction with Involvement, Incorporation of Feedback, Transparency Level, Effectiveness of Communication

**Table 9***H2 Coefficients<sup>a</sup>*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		95.0% Confidence Interval for B		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
H2	(Constant)	.385	.223		1.727	.085	-.054	.824
	Satisfaction with Involvement	-.052	.053	-.057	-.973	.332	-.156	.053
	Transparency Level	.176	.062	.172	2.812	.005	.053	.299
	Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives	.303	.057	.302	5.296	<.001	.190	.416
	Effectiveness of Communication	.145	.058	.155	2.481	.014	.030	.259
	Incorporation of Feedback	.229	.061	.213	3.762	<.001	.109	.348
	Perceived Overall Success	.068	.043	.076	1.589	.113	-.016	.153

a. Dependent Variable: Impact of Stakeholder Diversity

### Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 was that higher levels of stakeholder engagement are associated with improved satisfaction with the strategic planning process. The multiple regression analysis conducted for this hypothesis looked at one dependent variable: satisfaction with involvement in strategic planning (Q5) and six independent variables, transparency level (Q6), effectiveness of communication (Q8), incorporation of feedback (Q9), impact of stakeholder diversity (Q12), and perceived overall success (Q16). The H3 model summary, shown in Table 10, indicates a strong positive correlation between the dependent and independent variables ( $r=.667$ ). Table 11 shows the coefficients for model H3. The data demonstrates that transparency level ( $coef=.383, p<.001$ ) has a significant positive impact on satisfaction with involvement in strategic planning. This suggests that an increase in transparency is associated with higher satisfaction, aligning well with Hypothesis 3, which states that improved stakeholder engagement correlates with increased satisfaction. Diverse stakeholder practices ( $coef=.132, p=.051$ ) demonstrate a positive coefficient but are not statistically significant. Effectiveness of communication ( $coef=.319, p<.001$ ) demonstrates that effective communication significantly increases satisfaction with the strategic planning process. The incorporation of feedback ( $coef=.037, p=.598$ ) demonstrates little impact on satisfaction and is not statistically significant. Perceived overall success ( $coef=.074, p=.127$ ) demonstrates a positive coefficient but is not statistically significant. The impact of stakeholder diversity ( $coef=-.066, p=.332$ ) demonstrates a negative coefficient and is not statistically significant. Overall, these findings support the elements of transparency and the effectiveness of communication as a significant enhancer of satisfaction with the strategic planning process.

**Table 10***H3 Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
H3	.667 <sup>a</sup>	.445	.433	.762	.445	37.328	6	279	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Impact of Stakeholder Diversity, Perceived Overall Success, Transparency Level, Incorporation of Feedback, Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives, Effectiveness of Communication

**Table 11***H3 Coefficients<sup>a</sup>*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
H3	(Constant)	.561	.251		2.238	.026	.067	1.054
	Transparency Level	.383	.068	.338	5.658	<.001	.250	.516
	Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives	.132	.067	.119	1.962	.051	.000	.264
	Effectiveness of Communication	.319	.064	.308	5.017	<.001	.194	.445
	Incorporation of Feedback	.037	.070	.031	.527	.598	-.101	.175
	Perceived Overall Success	.074	.048	.075	1.529	.127	-.021	.169
	Impact of Stakeholder Diversity	-.066	.067	-.059	-.973	.332	-.198	.067

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction with Involvement



### **Additional Quantitative Analysis**

Although Q14 asked respondents to rank the types of engagement practices used at institutions, the data did not demonstrate strong statistical relevance in identifying which practices were more effective. The counts for each practice, while helpful in understanding the frequency of use, did not provide significant insights into their direct impact on strategic planning outcomes or stakeholder satisfaction. The wide range of responses, particularly with many respondents selecting all practices, suggests that institutions tend to adopt multiple engagement strategies.

Through further examination of the data, a compelling relationship emerged between leadership valuing stakeholder input (Q11) and satisfaction with involvement (Q5.) As shown in Table 12, the data demonstrates a trend where the increased perception that leadership values stakeholder input correlates with higher satisfaction levels. This data indicates that leadership's approach to stakeholder engagement, specifically concerning the perception of value placed on stakeholder feedback, appears to be a key driver of stakeholder satisfaction.

**Table 12***Leadership Value of Input and Satisfaction with Involvement Crosstabulation*

		Satisfaction with Involvement					Total	
			Extremely dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Extremely satisfied	
Leadership Value of Input	Strongly disagree	Count	1	1	2	2	1	7
		% within Leadership Value of Input	14.3%	14.3%	28.6%	28.6%	14.3%	100.0%
	Somewhat disagree	Count	0	3	3	7	1	14
		% within Leadership Value of Input	0.0%	21.4%	21.4%	50.0%	7.1%	100.0%
	Neither agree nor disagree	Count	2	14	25	13	5	59
		% within Leadership Value of Input	3.4%	23.7%	42.4%	22.0%	8.5%	100.0%
	Somewhat agree	Count	3	7	13	89	24	136
		% within Leadership Value of Input	2.2%	5.1%	9.6%	65.4%	17.6%	100.0%
	Strongly agree	Count	2	2	4	19	43	70
		% within Leadership Value of Input	2.9%	2.9%	5.7%	27.1%	61.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	8	27	47	130	74	286
		% within Leadership Value of Input	2.8%	9.4%	16.4%	45.5%	25.9%	100.0%

**Qualitative Findings**

Finally, the qualitative insights were examined. These were taken from open-ended questions provided to the participants. These questions allowed respondents to express their thoughts and feelings regarding stakeholder engagement and the strategic planning process. The responses captured a range of perspectives, from positive feedback on existing practices to constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement, and many respondents indicated that they had little input to add to the current process.

The thematic insights gathered from these qualitative responses were categorized into several key areas that provide a deeper understanding of stakeholder engagement from the stakeholders' perspectives. These areas include strong relationships and trust, the importance of structured feedback tools, satisfaction with current engagement levels, desire for more robust feedback channels, barriers to engagement, opportunities for growth in engagement, and limited additional input. These insights provide a deeper understanding of how stakeholder engagement is experienced from the stakeholder's viewpoint and offer insight into improving the processes and outcomes of strategic planning. One of the most central themes was the importance of strong relations and trust between stakeholders and leadership. Many respondents highlighted that effective engagement relies heavily on fostering a culture of openness and transparency. This data indicates that HEIs that prioritize building and maintaining relationships are more likely to benefit from robust stakeholder participation.

The importance of structured feedback tools also emerged as a prominent theme. Many respondents acknowledged the value of structured mechanisms, such as surveys and regular meetings, to gather feedback from a diverse range of stakeholders. While respondents expressed satisfaction with current engagement levels, some also suggested that more robust feedback channels would be beneficial to enable broader representation and inclusivity. This feedback suggests that HEIs should explore more innovative and inclusive feedback mechanisms to ensure that all stakeholder voices, particularly those who feel underrepresented, are heard.

In addition to these positive themes, several barriers to engagement were identified. Respondents mentioned challenges such as time constraints, a lack of awareness of strategic planning efforts, the perceived limited impact of their input, and a disconnect between leaders and stakeholders. These barriers were seen as impediments to meaningful engagement, with

some stakeholders recommending more transparent communication and transparency.

Furthermore, there was a general agreement that while current practices are effective, there are opportunities for growth in engagement, particularly concerning transparency around how feedback is used in decision-making. Regular updates on the implementation of strategic plans and greater visibility of the impact of stakeholder input were common suggestions. By addressing these themes, HEIs can foster a more collaborative and transparent strategic planning process that benefits both leadership and stakeholders.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

Guided by key research questions and hypotheses focused on enhancing the inclusivity, effectiveness, and outcomes of strategic planning in HEIs, this study examined the intricacies of stakeholder engagement. By exploring the practices, challenges, and outcomes associated with stakeholder involvement in strategic planning, the research provides valuable insights into how these practices can influence the success of planning initiatives. The study aimed to understand the dynamics of stakeholder engagement and how different factors such as transparency, diversity, communication, and leadership impact the overall effectiveness of the planning process.

The research also synthesized findings from previous studies and aligned them with principles outlined in the P-20 framework, which emphasizes continuity and coherence in educational pathways from early childhood through postsecondary education. The alignment allowed the study to tie its findings to broader educational objectives such as fostering innovation, implementation, diversity, and leadership in educational contexts. Combining these insights with P-20 principles led to actionable recommendations for HEIs, offering concrete strategies for improving stakeholder engagement and the success of the strategic planning process.

The study revealed several key insights into the dynamics of stakeholder engagement in strategic planning within HEIs. Stakeholder engagement emerges as a central element that influences the success and inclusivity of strategic outcomes. Institutions that effectively engage their stakeholders tend to develop more comprehensive, inclusive, and well-aligned plans. Furthermore, the data highlighted the critical role of transparency and communication in maintaining stakeholder trust and ensuring the successful implementation of strategic initiatives.

This aligns with Gardner's (2021) findings, which emphasize that transparency in HEI strategic planning is essential to maintaining stakeholder trust and ensuring effective outcomes.

The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of how stakeholder engagement influences various aspects of strategic planning, from the plan's development to the satisfaction of stakeholders engaged in the process. By engaging stakeholders at every stage, HEIs can ensure that their strategic plans reflect diverse perspectives and are more likely to meet the institution's goals. These insights underscore the importance of prioritizing stakeholder engagement in strategic planning.

### **Stakeholder Engagement and Success**

One of the primary findings of this study is the significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and the overall success of strategic planning. Hypothesis 1 proposed that effective stakeholder engagement, characterized by high levels of participation, collaboration, and transparency, would lead to more successful strategic planning outcomes. The data supports this hypothesis, with a clear positive correlation between the degree of stakeholder engagement and the perceived success of strategic plans. Institutions where stakeholders were more involved throughout the planning process, particularly through transparent communication, were found to have higher levels of satisfaction with the outcomes of strategic planning. This finding supports the research of Falqueto et al. (2020), which shows that fostering stakeholder commitment and ownership is essential for achieving institutional objectives.

Stakeholders who feel that they are actively engaged are more likely to perceive the outcomes as successful. The data indicates that participation and collaboration foster a sense of ownership of the strategic plan, contributing to perceived success. Moreover, the sense of shared responsibility that emerges from collaborative efforts strengthens the commitment to the plan's

implementation. Research from Freeman and McVea (2005) suggests that stakeholder commitment solidifies during collaborative planning phases, enhancing implementation success.

Transparency also emerged as an important factor in determining the success of strategic planning. The data shows that stakeholders report more satisfaction when institutions maintain a transparent process. Transparency builds trust and ensures that stakeholders understand how their input influences outcomes. The relationship between transparency and success highlights the importance of clear, consistent communication as a key driver of successful outcomes.

The implications of these findings suggest that HEIs should prioritize stakeholder engagement as a strategic tool for enhancing planning outcomes. Engaging stakeholders early and often, maintaining transparency, and ensuring that stakeholder input is meaningfully incorporated into the final strategic plan are essential for improving institutional success. By enhancing collaboration and participation, HEIs can create plans that better align with institutional goals.

### **Stakeholder Engagement and Diversity**

Another important finding from this study is the positive impact of stakeholder diversity on strategic planning outcomes. Hypothesis 2 proposed that effective stakeholder engagement would lead to more comprehensive, inclusive, and well-aligned strategic plans, and the data strongly supports this hypothesis. In particular, the inclusion of diverse perspectives was shown to have a positive impact on the comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of strategic plans. Institutions that actively sought and incorporated a wide range of stakeholder viewpoints tended to develop plans that were perceived as more successful and aligned with the institution's goals.

Diverse stakeholder engagement is a strategic advantage. The findings highlight that when institutions prioritize the engagement of a variety of stakeholders, including individuals

with different backgrounds and areas of expertise, they are more likely to create more comprehensive plans that reflect the entire institution's needs. The diversity of input helps to ensure that every critical perspective is included and that the plan is aligned with varied interests. The data demonstrates that a broad spectrum of voices that are more likely to anticipate and address challenges, ensuring that plans are resilient and capable of adapting to future needs. Additionally, by involving diverse stakeholders, institutions foster a culture of inclusivity and collaboration that enhances the planning process and overall future direction.

The findings emphasize the importance of institutional efforts to ensure that stakeholder engagement practices seek out diversity. Promoting diversity in stakeholder engagement is not just a matter of inclusion, it is a key driver of strategic planning outcomes. HEIs should develop strategies for identifying and engaging stakeholders who represent a wide range of perspectives, including creating opportunities for input from individuals who may not be typically involved in the strategic planning process.

### **Stakeholder Involvement and Impact**

Hypothesis 3 explored whether higher levels of stakeholder engagement were associated with improved satisfaction with the strategic planning process. The data revealed a strong correlation between active stakeholder involvement and the success of strategic plans. The finding suggests that the frequency and depth of engagement are critical factors in determining stakeholder satisfaction with strategic planning. Additionally, the results indicate that meaningful participation and communication throughout the process enhance stakeholders' perceptions of the plan's success.

Institutions that engaged stakeholders throughout the planning process rather than at the beginning or end reported higher satisfaction levels. The continuous engagement fosters a sense



of ownership, as stakeholders feel their input is valued and considered at different stages. The data suggests that successful strategic planning requires more than just involving stakeholders, it requires ongoing engagement that allows for feedback and adaptation throughout. When stakeholders feel their perspectives are genuinely valued and reflected in strategic decisions, they are more likely to view the outcomes as positive. Stakeholders expressed that transparency and regular communication from institutional leadership played a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of success.

The data indicates that effective engagement also contributes to aligning plans with institutional goals. Stakeholders who were deeply involved in shaping the plan perceived that the outcomes were more closely aligned with the institution's mission and vision, underscoring the importance of integrating stakeholder insights to ensure that the strategic plan reflects the institution's collective goals. Engagement improves satisfaction, and it has the dual benefit of ensuring that the strategic outcomes are relevant and aligned with institutional priorities.

### **Leadership Roles**

In addition to information about the hypotheses, the study revealed that the role of leadership in fostering stakeholder engagement is critical. The data strongly supports the idea that when leadership values stakeholder input, there is a corresponding increase in both the frequency of stakeholder involvement and satisfaction with the strategic planning process. This finding also supports the hypothesis that effective stakeholder engagement leads to more successful strategic planning outcomes. However, for stakeholder engagement to be effective, it must be supported by leadership. Leadership's ability to communicate the value of stakeholder contributions and actively involve them in the planning process should be a central focus for institutions seeking to improve engagement.

The data shows that leadership support for engagement directly influences the effectiveness of the engagement process. Leaders who prioritize transparency and open communication create an environment where stakeholders feel comfortable contributing their ideas and feedback. Which, in turn, leads to more successful and inclusive strategic outcomes. The study's findings suggest that leadership is a key driver of stakeholder satisfaction. Moreover, the study highlights that leadership is responsible for facilitating stakeholder engagement and ensuring that the engagement process is meaningful. Leaders who take an active role in integrating stakeholder input are more likely to see positive outcomes.

### **Practical Significance**

The practical significance of this study is rooted in the actionable insights it offers for HEIs seeking to enhance the strategic planning process through effective stakeholder engagement. Central to these recommendations is the importance of transparency and communication, which emerged as critical factors influencing the perceived success of strategic initiatives. HEIs should prioritize building transparent planning processes that actively involve stakeholders from the early stages, ensuring that participants feel informed and valued throughout the entire process. Focusing on transparency fosters trust and collaboration, leading to more successful outcomes.

In addition to transparency, the study highlights the need for HEIs to actively seek and incorporate diverse perspectives. Structures should be created to ensure that all voices are heard and that diverse viewpoints are integrated into final decisions. Institutions should establish systems that encourage continuous feedback and input from various stakeholders, including faculty, staff, students, and the community. Inclusivity not only improves the quality of the plans but also enhances stakeholder satisfaction with the planning process.

A third recommendation centers on the need for HEIs to develop robust communication strategies that keep stakeholders engaged and informed throughout the planning process. The data from the study revealed that clear, effective communication is one of the most significant factors in determining stakeholder success. Institutions should implement regular updates, create open channels for dialogue, and establish mechanisms for gathering and responding to stakeholder feedback in real time. These communication efforts should be ongoing throughout the evaluation and implementation phases. HEIs can ensure that stakeholders remain involved and invested in the success by maintaining consistent communication.

Lastly, the findings emphasize the role of leadership in facilitating effective stakeholder engagement. While not a focus of the hypotheses, leadership stood out as a key factor influencing both stakeholder involvement and satisfaction. HEIs should ensure that leaders actively promote a culture of engagement where stakeholder contributions are valued and integrated into the decision-making. Leaders should be visible champions of the planning process, demonstrating a commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and communication. HEI leaders can ensure that strategic planning initiatives are more successful and more sustainable by fostering an environment where engagement is prioritized.

### **P-20 Implications**

The P-20 framework serves as a comprehensive model for aligning educational strategies from early childhood through postsecondary education and emphasizes continuity and coherence in educational pathways. The P-20 principles of innovation, implementation, diversity, and leadership provide a lens through which stakeholder engagement can be analyzed. HEIs can address key challenges and improve engagement across all stakeholder groups, ensuring that

strategic initiatives are implemented effectively and resonate with broader educational goals and objectives.

Innovation, as a P-20 principle, is critical to adapting education to meet the evolving needs of society. In this study, innovation in stakeholder engagement is explored through the development of dynamic and flexible strategic plans that address the diverse needs of HEI stakeholders. The study's findings confirmed that innovative stakeholder engagement approaches were necessary to foster an inclusive strategic planning process. The findings underscored the importance of ensuring that educational policies and practices are actionable and aligned with the institution's mission, vision, and values, echoing the P-20 emphasis on aligning educational pathways across the different stages of learning.

Implementation is deeply interwoven within the outcomes of this study, which provide actionable recommendations for HEIs to enhance their strategic planning processes. This study highlights the importance of implementing strategies that incorporate broad stakeholder feedback. The data demonstrates that successful implementation relies on transparent communication and the continuous involvement of stakeholders. Moreover, implementing these strategies requires a structured approach where feedback loops and adaptive practices are established to ensure that initiatives are responsive to stakeholder needs. This implementation methodology aligns with the P-20 focus on effective implementation to foster educational continuity across all education levels.

Diversity is a core component that aligns with the P-20 framework by demonstrating how integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives enhances the inclusiveness and effectiveness of HEI strategic plans. The research provides evidence that diverse engagement leads to more effective strategic plans that better reflect stakeholders' priorities. The findings advocate that HEIs

prioritize diversity as a strategic direction that drives better decision-making. Emphasizing diversity in stakeholder engagement ensures that the planning process benefits from a wide range of experiences and enriches the educational environment.

As highlighted by the study's findings, leadership is critical to the success of stakeholder engagement strategies. The research underscores that effective leadership is pivotal in fostering an environment where stakeholder input is valued and effectively integrated into strategic planning. Leaders in HEIs play a key role in ensuring that they communicate the importance of stakeholder engagement, encourage diverse participation, and implement new and innovative strategies. The study's conclusions support the P-20 framework by demonstrating that solid leadership is essential for translating stakeholder engagement into educational successes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study's limitations are multifaceted and significantly influence the interpretation and application of the findings. First, while a sample size of 286 is adequate for fundamental analysis, it limits the robustness of statistical tests, particularly if broken down into subsets. The lack of community members completing the survey supports this as a key limitation of the study, underscoring a critical gap in the study's demographics. A larger and more complete sample would be required for the findings to be universally applicable across institutions.

Moreover, the study is cross-sectional, so only correlations can be observed and not causal relationships. This limitation is crucial to acknowledge as it means that while relationships can be detected, asserting that one causes the other is out of the scope of this study's methodology. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces another layer of complexity that can introduce bias into the study. Finally, the absence of longitudinal data presents a significant limitation in understanding the impacts of stakeholder engagement

practices on strategic planning outcomes. Data points must be tracked over time to discern the long-term effectiveness of engagement strategies and their influence on strategic planning and success.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research stem from the insights exposed by this study, where future investigation could provide a deeper understanding and more refined strategies. First, future studies should aim to address the limitations of this study by incorporating larger and more diverse sample sizes. A larger and more varied sample could provide insights that can be generalized across institutions. Diversifying the sample will help to understand how stakeholder engagement practices can be customized to specific stakeholder populations and strategic objectives.

Longitudinal studies would be invaluable in understanding the long-term impacts and sustainability of stakeholder engagement strategies. By tracking the same institutions over time, researchers could observe how initial engagement efforts influence subsequent planning cycles and whether initial successes are sustained, improved, or diminished. Longitudinal studies could also explore the long-term effects of stakeholder engagement on institutional success metrics, such as student retention and graduation rates.

Future studies should investigate the psychological and organizational factors that influence stakeholder engagement. Understanding how the perceived value of engagement initiatives impacts stakeholders' willingness to participate and the quality of input they provide would be key to improving future practices. In addition, understanding the barriers to engagement, particularly from those who are dissatisfied, could help in developing engagement strategies that are mindful of these populations.

Finally, future research should investigate the role of leadership in fostering an environment conducive to effective stakeholder engagement. The data from this study strongly supports the idea that when stakeholders feel that leaders value their input, their satisfaction increases. However, the specifics of this data have yet to be explored. Studies that examine leadership styles and practices that promote open communication and trust would be particularly important to further strategic planning methodology for HEIs. Examining leadership styles and their impact on stakeholder engagement outcomes could provide valuable insights. These studies could also evaluate training programs for institutional leaders that focus on stakeholder engagement competencies. Another important direction for future research might be examining how leaders can effectively integrate feedback while aligning with the institution's mission, vision, and goals.

The recommendation for future research highlights the importance of building upon the findings of this study to deepen the understanding of stakeholder engagement in HEI strategic planning. Addressing these gaps will offer more robust guidance to HEIs that will help to create strategies that are not only inclusive and comprehensive but also adapt to the changing landscape of higher education. Furthermore, exploring new dimensions of engagement, such as digital and hybrid engagement models, will provide valuable insights into how institutions can continue to innovate and sustain stakeholder engagement in a rapidly changing educational environment.

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## Appendix A – IRB Protocol



Institutional Review Board  
328 Wells Hall  
Murray, KY 42071-3318  
(270)809-2916  
[Msu.ird@murraystate.edu](mailto:Msu.ird@murraystate.edu)

Date: 09/11/2024

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Gillen

Faculty Sponsor: Brian Bourke

IRB Approver: Megan St. Peters

IRB Reference Number: 25-012

The IRB has completed its review of Exempt protocol Stakeholder Engagement: Challenges, Metrics, and Tactical Solutions in Higher Education Strategic Planning. After review and consideration, the IRB has determined that the research as described in the protocol form, will be conducted in compliance with Murray State University Guidelines for the Protection of human participants.

**The forms and materials approved for use in this research study are attached to the email containing this letter. These are the forms and materials that must be presented to the subjects. Use of any process or forms other than those approved by the IRB will be considered misconduct in research as stated in the MSU IRB procedures and Guidelines section 20.3.**

**Your stated data collection period is from 09/11/2024-09/11/2025**

If data collection extends beyond this period, please submit a continuation to an approved protocol form detailing the new data collection period and the reason for the change.

**This Exempt approval is valid until 09/11/2025.**

If data collection and analysis extends beyond this date, the research project must be reviewed as a continuation project by the IRB prior to the end of the approval period, 09/11/2025. You must reapply for IRB approval by submitting a Project Update and Closure form (available at [murraystate.edu/IRB](http://murraystate.edu/IRB)). You must allow ample time for IRB processing and decision before your expiration date, or your research must stop until IRB approval is received. If the research project is completed by the end of the approval period, a Project Update and Closure form must be submitted for the IRB review so your protocol may be closed. It is your responsibility to submit the appropriate paperwork promptly.

**This protocol is approved. You may begin data collection now**

## **Appendix B – Informed Consent**

You are being invited to participate in a survey research study conducted through Murray State University. As such, I am providing the following information so that you may make an informed decision on whether you would like to participate:

1. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between teacher job satisfaction, and the use of a classroom economy as a classroom management strategy.
2. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw/stop participating at any time.
3. All of your responses will remain anonymous. (No one will know which answers are yours.)
4. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.
5. Although your responses will remain anonymous, your data/answers may be combined with the data/answers of others and submitted for presentation at conventions or in publications in scholarly journals.
6. You will receive no direct benefits because you participated in this research study. However, your

participation will help to expand our understanding of teacher job satisfaction.

7. There are no foreseen risks associated with your participation in this research study.

8. Your completion of this questionnaire indicates that you voluntarily consent to participate in this study. You are free to discontinue your participation at any time.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS. ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONDUCT OF THIS PROJECT SHOULD BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF Brian Bourke in the Educational Studies, Leadership, and Counseling Department at (270)809-3588, or [bbourke@murraystate.edu](mailto:bbourke@murraystate.edu). ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT SHOULD BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE IRB COORDINATOR AT (270) 809-2916 or [msu.ird@murraystate.edu](mailto:msu.ird@murraystate.edu). By clicking I Agree, you acknowledge that you have read and understand the information provided, and thereby provide your informed consent to participate in this research study.

- I consent, begin the study
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

### Appendix C – Survey Questions

- Q1. What is your primary role at the institution?
- Student
  - Faculty
  - Staff
  - Administrator
  - Alumni
  - Donor
  - Governance
  - Other (please specify)
- Q2. What type of institution are you affiliated with?
- Public University
  - Private University
  - Community College
  - Other (please specify)
- Q3. How many years have you been affiliated with your institution?
- Less than 1 year
  - 1-3 years
  - 4-7 years
  - 8-15 years
  - More than 15 years
- Q4. How frequently are you involved in strategic planning activities at your institution?
- Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very often
- Q5. How satisfied are you with your level of involvement in strategic planning activities?
- Very dissatisfied
  - Dissatisfied
  - Neutral
  - Satisfied
  - Very satisfied

- Q6. How would you rate the level of transparency in the strategic planning process at your institution?
- Very Low
  - Low
  - Moderate
  - High
  - Very High
- Q7. To what extent do you agree that diverse stakeholder perspectives are considered in the strategic planning process at your institution?
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neutral
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- Q8. How effectively does your institution communicate strategic planning updates to stakeholders?
- Very ineffective
  - Ineffective
  - Neutral
  - Effective
  - Very effective
- Q9. How often are stakeholder feedback and suggestions incorporated into the strategic plan?
- Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Very Often
- Q10. What are the main barriers to effective stakeholder engagement at your institution? (Rank the following items on a scale from 1-5 with the greatest barriers being 1 and 5 being the least)
- Lack of communication
  - Lack of transparency
  - Time constraints
  - Limited resources
  - Lack of interest



- Q11. To what extent do you agree that leadership at your institution values stakeholder input in strategic planning?
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neutral
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- Q12. How would you rate the impact of stakeholder diversity on the quality of strategic planning outcomes?
- Very low
  - Low
  - Moderate
  - High
  - Very high
- Q13. How would you rate the impact of stakeholder engagement on the success of strategic planning at your institution?
- Very low
  - Low
  - Moderate
  - High
  - Very high
- Q14. Which of the following engagement practices are used at your institution? (Select all that apply)
- Regular meetings
  - Workshops
  - Surveys
  - Focus groups
  - Online forums
  - Other (please specify)
- Q15. How effective are the engagement practices used at your institution?
- Very ineffective
  - Ineffective
  - Neutral
  - Effective
  - Very effective

- Q16. How would you rate the overall success of the strategic planning process at your institution?
- Not very successful
  - Unsuccessful
  - Neutral
  - Successful
  - Very Successful
- Q17. How confident are you that the strategic plan will achieve its stated objectives?
- Not confident at all
  - Slightly confident
  - Neutral
  - Confident
  - Very confident
- Q18. What improvements would you suggest to enhance stakeholder engagement in the strategic planning process?
- Q19. Do you feel that the current engagement practices effectively capture the needs and concerns of all stakeholders? If not, please explain.
- Q20. Please share any additional comments related to stakeholder engagement in strategic planning at your institution