

SUNY Maritime College AKA Approach and Work Plan for Strategic Planning

Our approach assumes a close partnership between AKA and SUNY Maritime College throughout the process. We would work closely with the President and, we recommend, a Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) that would serve as the primary deliberative and working group for the planning effort. The approach also casts AKA in the multiple roles of facilitator, idea catalyst, project manager, analyst, drafter and editor. As such, we would work closely with Maritime to ensure we build on solid thinking that the President and others at the College have already engaged in.

The process we describe below will enable Maritime to develop a clear and bold strategic plan through an inclusive process that builds consensus about the College's identity, vision for the future, and the strategies to achieve that vision.

We suggest undertaking the project in five sequential phases, aligned with the project milestones described in the RFP:

- I. Undertake an Initial Analysis of the Needs, Issues, and Goals of Maritime College's Strategic Plan.
- II. Develop an Initial Framework of the Strategic Plan and Present to Stakeholders.
- III. Create a First Draft of the Strategic Plan and Present to Stakeholders.
- IV. Complete the Final Version of the Strategic Plan after Engaging Stakeholders in the Maritime Community.
- V. Present the Final Strategic Plan to the College.

Phase I: Undertake an Initial Analysis of the Needs, Issues, and Goals of Maritime College's Strategic Plan

1. Conduct a project organization and planning meeting with the President and other College leaders as desired by the President to:
 - Confirm overall project approach, time table, logistical support, and individuals and groups involved and their respective roles;
 - Identify individuals for AKA to speak with in a first set of introductory interviews;
 - Plan for ongoing communication about the strategic planning effort to the Maritime community and other key stakeholders in order to engage them with the process and build commitment to the resulting plan; and
 - Discuss reports, analyses, white papers, and the like completed by Maritime or outside parties that bear on the strategic planning process.

2. Become quickly informed about SUNY Maritime through:

- Confidential, informational interviews with members of Maritime’s academic and administrative leadership or, as appropriate, others who can provide a thoughtful overview of the College—its current issues, opportunities and challenges; and
- Review of relevant print and electronic materials about Maritime, including the 2016 Performance Improvement Plan; 2013-2018 strategic plan and other relevant program plans; self-studies for and reports from accrediting bodies; Maritime campus plan for Start-Up New York; reports or other documentation of the work of the committee that developed Maritime’s new mission, vision and values statements; “fact books,” promotional materials, and enrollment, fundraising or financial analyses; draft or final versions of Maritime’s *Applied Learning Plan* and *Diversity and Inclusiveness Plan*; and other relevant information.

These steps will ensure that we promptly understand Maritime’s current situation and key issues, ideas and concerns; become familiar with the major stakeholders and their expectations and interests; and are informed about ongoing College initiatives.

3. Develop a discussion document based on the preceding steps that would articulate strategic issues and themes, float potential new Maritime initiatives, and serve as the basis for discussions with the various individuals and groups noted in the next work phase.

4. Facilitate a first meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee to:

- Review the work plan and timeframe for the strategic planning process;
- Discuss the respective roles of the SPC, AKA and other participants in the planning process, as well as ground rules for the Committee;
- Develop an effective plan for communication to stakeholders about the strategic planning process in order to engage them with it in meaningful ways and obtain their feedback and suggestions for creation of the strategic plan;
- Identify additional individuals and groups with whom AKA should meet; and
- Discuss the set of preliminary strategic issues, themes and new ideas that we have prepared based on the work to date, and obtain the SPC’s feedback on it.

5. Conduct up to sixteen additional confidential individual or group interviews of Maritime faculty, staff, and student leaders; relevant industry partners; significant funders; and other knowledgeable external observers/experts to obtain their views on Maritime’s key strategic challenges and best opportunities over the coming years and to solicit feedback on the preliminary strategic themes.

6. Prepare a set of high-level working hypotheses—essentially “straw man” assertions for review and discussion—about Maritime’s current strategic positioning and potential new direction(s) and initiatives going forward.
7. Moderate an SPC meeting to discuss the initial working hypotheses and:
 - Identify areas of agreement and disagreement;
 - Pinpoint issues requiring additional analysis and/or discussion; and
 - Suggest the overall architecture of the strategic plan and content of its major sections.

Phase II: Develop an Initial Framework for the Strategic Plan and Present to Stakeholders

1. Based on feedback from the SPC on the working hypotheses, prepare a preliminary framework on which to build the full plan.

It is our experience that participants in planning processes find it helpful to have a picture of what the eventual strategic plan will look like and how it will be organized. We would address this by creating a preliminary framework, the primary component of which would be a set of approximately four to six overarching strategic goals that address the College’s priorities for the next three to five years. Other components of the framework would probably include:

- A preliminary introduction that provides a context for Maritime’s planning effort—its rationale, the concerns it responds to, anticipated results, and the like;
- The current mission, vision and values statements for consideration and possible revision later in the process; and
- Placeholders for possible appendices (*e.g.*, description of the planning process, SPC membership; etc.).

In our experience, planning committees often get bogged down by attempting to draft complete mission, vision and values statements early in the process. Having recently revised these, Maritime has the advantage of beginning its detailed planning process with consensus at a high level on the College’s overall direction. However, even with such consensus, we would encourage the SPC to revisit the mission, vision and values after it has developed goals and specific supporting strategies and initiatives for the strategic plan. Such a reexamination would help to ensure all elements of the plan are aligned with its mission, vision, and values and enable the Committee to fine tune the plan as whole to increase its clarity and impact.

2. Facilitate a meeting of the SPC to discuss the framework, refine its major ideas, and identify areas for revision, elaboration and consolidation.

As consensus emerges around preliminary strategic goals, the SPC can jump-start development of the strategic plan by placing under each goal those ideas relevant to it that have arisen from the Committee's discussions and input from Maritime stakeholders. These ideas might be as specific as potential strategies and initiatives for achieving the goal or as general as observations and findings that might have an impact on it.

Phase III: Create a First Draft of the Strategic Plan and Present it to Maritime Stakeholders

1. Generate specific strategies and initiatives for each goal of the plan following the SPC meeting of the previous phase. While the goals of the plan represent broad targets—big, often general, outcomes an institution is striving to achieve—strategies are what Maritime would do to achieve its goals, the “hows.” In turn, initiatives are the more specific projects and activities the College would undertake to put in place its strategies. Although, like strategies, they speak to “how,” they do so at a finer level of detail.¹ Developing this detail can be done in several ways:
 - It might entail having members and/or subcommittees of the SPC prepare brief drafts of specific strategies and initiatives for review and discussion with the full Committee.
 - It might also tap into relevant work being done by other individuals or committees (standing or ad hoc) of the College (such as an advisory group on learning technologies, a diversity and inclusion task force, or other such groups).
 - In all cases, AKA would both draft major sections of the text and edit material generated by others to ensure clarity, consistency, and a smooth “storyline” for the strategic plan.
2. Prepare and revise two full drafts of the strategic plan and moderate meetings of the SPC to review and discuss each draft. Several specifics about this step:
 - These meetings, held approximately monthly, would be opportunities for subcommittees or individual SPC members to present the results of their deliberation and drafting, which would then be discussed and shaped by the Committee and incorporated into the emerging strategic plan by AKA.

¹ We are keenly aware that the wealth of terminology in strategic planning—“priorities,” “goals,” “objectives,” “initiatives,” “tasks,” “action steps”—is confusing. Our bias is not to get hung up in the terminology and instead call the components of the plan whatever is clear to those involved in the planning process. A shared understanding is useful. Spending time in debates over terminology is not. Additionally, “one person’s goal is another person’s strategy.” In other words, depending on its scale or organizational level, the entity doing the planning (*e.g.*, university system, university, college/school, department, etc.), may consider something an overarching goal that a larger entity would consider a strategy or initiative. And vice versa.

- The first and subsequent drafts of the strategic plan would also be shared with the President and College Council for their feedback and suggestions.
- Through these iterations of drafting, SPC discussion, and revision, we would develop a full strategic plan for Maritime without having the Committee get bogged down in wordsmithing.
- The goal would be to reach consensus on a penultimate draft that would be concise, clear and bold and probably not more than ten or twelve pages. This draft would then be shared widely throughout the Maritime community for feedback.

Phase IV: Complete the Final Version of the Strategic Plan after Engaging Stakeholders in the Maritime Community

1. Develop, in consultation with the SPC, an approach for sharing the draft strategic plan with the College community in ways that engage its members effectively and obtain useful feedback for shaping the final plan. Regardless of the approach designed, it should ensure that:
 - All stakeholders have an opportunity to review the penultimate draft and provide feedback (whether or not they choose to);
 - There are opportunities for stakeholders to discuss the draft with the SPC; and
 - Multiple avenues and forums are used for dissemination, review and discussion of the draft.
2. Provide widespread stakeholder engagement and feedback through activities such as:
 - Posting the penultimate draft on Maritime’s website with the capability for individuals to post comments publically online or to email their thoughts and suggestions privately to the SPC or directly to AKA;
 - One or two College-wide town-hall discussions of the draft plan; and
 - Informal discussion of the draft by individual College departments, who would be ask to share a summary of their comments with the SPC.

It would also be important to have focused discussions about the penultimate draft with the SUNY Maritime College Council and selected external stakeholders.

Phase V: Present the Final Strategic Plan to the College

1. Review feedback from the Maritime community and others, and meet with the SPC to identify desired final revisions to the plan.

2. Based on the preceding step, prepare a final draft of the strategic plan that clearly identifies Maritime's mission, vision, goals and strategies for the future. With consensus from the SPC, submit this final draft to the President SPC of the College.

Development of Strategic Plan Performance Metrics

Many colleges and universities that have developed strategic plans find it useful and important to set performance metrics that measure progress toward achieving the goals of the plan. By agreeing on a set of metrics and associated targets, and creating a process for monitoring and reporting on these measures, an institution establishes a powerful mechanism for accountability to its stakeholders—those within the college community as well as others externally charged with oversight of the institution.

Below, we describe a process for developing such metrics that would run concurrently with the phases described above. By pursuing such a process as a part of the overall strategic planning effort, Maritime would harness the SPC's detailed knowledge of the strategic plan as well as momentum for implementation of the plan that is usually at its peak as the planning process is concluding.

As the penultimate draft of the strategic begins to take shape, facilitate a concurrent process to develop performance metrics for each of the goals of the strategic plan. These metrics would measure progress toward the desired outcomes underlying each goal.

1. The SPC would establish several subcommittees, each responsible for developing potential metrics for a specific goal. Each subcommittee would include SPC members familiar with the departments and functions most responsible for the activities necessary to pursue the given goal. These individuals would serve as chairs or co-chairs of the task forces, which could also include people within the College with relevant functional or technical expertise.
2. AKA would prepare materials to assist the task forces in their work (e.g., statement of charge, definitions, templates, recommended work plan, etc.) and subsequently conduct a briefing for the chairs of the metrics task forces, and all available members of the task forces.
3. In between meetings of the full SPC, each subcommittee would meet to develop a limited pool of specific metrics for its assigned goal (including for selected strategies and initiatives underlying the overarching goal). The subcommittees would also identify the extent to which data are currently obtainable to respond to these metrics.
 - AKA would attend the initial meeting of each subcommittee, if desired, to provide guidance and answer questions that arise.
 - AKA would also be available to review written reports or other documents developed by the subcommittees and provide feedback and guidance to shape their work.

- Additionally, we would encourage subcommittees to examine the strategic plans of other colleges and universities to take account of performance metrics used by these institutions.
4. The subcommittees would report their results back to the full SPC for discussion as part of one or two regular meetings. Engaging the full Committee is important because often a dialectic occurs in developing metrics. As a subcommittee struggles to identify specific metrics for a goal, it may realize that such measurement is challenging because the goal—the desired outcome—has not been defined clearly enough. Although frustrating, such realizations are opportunities to revise a goal to describe more clearly “what success will look like” and then generate a clear metric based on this new definition.
 5. Through discussion of the proposed metrics with the full SPC, and possible iterations of the subcommittees’ work, the SPC would reach consensus on a limited set of metrics and targets for the strategic plan.
 6. The SPC would also propose a process for monitoring and reporting on these metrics. This process would identify the parties responsible for gathering the necessary data, reviewing the results in comparison with the established targets, discussing the implications of these results, and proposing modification of the College’s strategies and initiatives in response. In AKA’s experience, the individuals and groups most involved in these activities include: members of a college’s institutional research staff, institutional leadership and governance bodies (e.g., president’s cabinet, faculty senate or advisory group, the board of trustees, and the like).