

# Youngstown State University Board of Trustees

## Strategic Planning Case Study

Prepared for the YSU Board by Trustees Molly Seals and Ted Roberts with intent to incite emotional catharsis, engagement, discussion & self-reflection

**Context:** Over summer 2018, members of the [Strategic Planning Organization Team](#) developed constituency-based Case Studies. The constituencies included the following: undergraduate and graduate students; unions (faculty and staff); chairs/directors; deans; alumni; the community; Academic Senate; athletics; academic affairs; and senior leadership.

In various ways, the constituencies were asked to address the following: What was your experience in helping shape the [current strategic plan](#)? How might you imagine being optimally engaged in developing the next strategic plan? What are the major issues facing higher education that from the perspective of the constituency should receive a high level of consideration in the upcoming strategic planning process.

The following represents perspectives developed by two members of the YSU Board of Trustees who are members of the [Strategic Planning Organization Team](#).

**Background:** Nine members of the YSU Board of Trustees are selected by the Governor of Ohio and appointed to 9-year terms. The board also consists of 2 student members who attend Youngstown State and are appointed by Governor, and up to 2 non-voting national/global members appointed by the Trustees. The appointment and powers of the Board are set forth in the Ohio Revised Code Chapter 3356 and R.C. Section 369.180. The YSU Board of Trustees governs by statute, its bylaws and its policies.

This approach fulfills the American model of higher education governance and the unique concept of volunteer citizen trusteeship that provides for autonomy, independence and academic freedom. Public trustees adhere to core principles pertaining to effective trusteeship as advocates for the university: ensuring its institutional mission, education quality and fiscal vitality; selecting, supporting and assessing its chief executive while respecting the balance between governing and managing; charging the chief executive with leading, implementing and evaluating effective strategic planning, participating in the process and monitoring its progress; engaging with the university's major constituents to provide community perspective; participating in fundraising and practicing personally affordable philanthropy; ensuring current and effective institutional and board policies. Trustees are called to conduct business with transparency, high ethical and fiduciary standards, and adherence to public meeting and record laws.

**The Key Role of the Board:** YSU Trustees are advocates for the university to further its mission and enhance its legacy to the local, regional, national, and global communities, while maintaining the highest level of accountability to the taxpayers of the State of Ohio. To do this, the YSU Board of Trustees must assure effective Presidential leadership and work with the university faculty, staff and students to create an effective strategic plan to be supported by university resources in a fiscally responsible way that achieves the budgetary balance so critical to the long-term sustainability of the university. Thereafter the board monitors the plan and calls for sound corrective plans where needed to assure successful achievement.

From [“A Practical Guide To Strategic Planning In Higher Education”](#) published by the Society for College and University Planning, the following reflects the role of the board in the planning process:

“Generally, members of governing boards should (1) ensure planning takes place, and (2) insist plans are used regularly for decision making. In carrying out these basic responsibilities, boards should attend to the following:

- Recognize and promote the usefulness of planning in higher education and support its use,
- Review and approve a planning process for the institution,
- Hold the chief executive accountable for the planning function,
- Participate in certain steps in the planning process, and
- Use the institution’s plans to make decisions, especially those that involve setting priorities and allocating resources.”

**How our Strategic Plan Will Guide Us to our Future:** The Youngstown State University Strategic Plan will need to answer key “Who, What, Where and How” questions. The following points appeared in a [Strategic Plan of Cornell University, 2010-2015](#) and similar questions appear in other University strategic plans:

Four basic questions to help organize the planning process:

- Who are we as a university?
- Where do we want to go as a university?
- How do we get there?
- How do we know when we arrive?

The 2020 Strategic Plan of YSU will likewise need to answer:

- Who are we as a university?
- Who do we want and need to become and where do we want to go as a university?
- How do we get there?
- How do we know when we arrive?

As an anchor institution and given that our local, state and national challenges are also our challenges (poverty, urban decline, job loss, income inequality, increasing diversity, racial and gender inequities, and climate change), we are also called to answer additional profound questions like:

- How do we sustain higher education at our university as a powerful, affordable and meaningful agent of self-realization and social progress that address many of these challenges?

The process to construct our new Strategic Plan shall support our *Guiding Principles of Shared Governance*. The goal is to engage all stakeholders in the process and provide opportune time and approach to collect input, feedback, and thought leadership from a diversity of

stakeholders as well as progress updates and feedback throughout the life of the plan. Some of the key principles driving our engagement plan shall include the following:

- Creative engagement (Not just asking for input but finding creative ways of assuring input and considering it)
- Input precedes feedback (Opportunity for big ideas from all)
- Exchange throughout the process (Input, Shared Data Reservoir, Build, Feedback, Activate & Achieve)
- Everyone is a connector to someone (Communication and Engagement is a shared responsibility of all)
- Meet constituencies where they are (Go where they are and seek first to understand unique WIIFMs of each constituency group)

Our strategic plan should be *aspirational* to inspire our university through its aims, goals and ideologies to higher levels of achievement and thus helping our students to achieve higher levels of success. *Student Success and Achievement* shall be paramount in our new Strategic Plan as that is why we exist and without students we would not be. [Economic development](#) and job growth will be of key focus as well -- as without it the Ohio tax base cannot exist to support sustainability of this and other Ohio universities. *Research* shall be of key focus - as that is the pathway to assuring students (undergraduate and graduate) are prepared with the critical thinking and application skills required to meet the challenges of today.

Some of the aspirational goals that appear in the [Strategic Plan of Cornell University, 2010-2015](#) involve:

- Enroll, educate, and graduate deserving, promising, and diverse students.
- Recruit, nurture, and retain an excellent and diverse faculty, and an excellent and diverse staff who provide outstanding support to faculty and students.
- Strengthen public engagement of university education, research, and programs with local, national, and international communities.
- Sustain organizational structures and processes that promote and support academic excellence in a cost effective, balanced-budget manner.

Given our [unique challenges](#), just as recognized by Tulane University, we will also:

- Seek *a more collaborative and applied scholarship*, committed to change that brings faculty, students, local residents and government together in projects addressing community, region and world needs.