The Commission on
INDEPENDENT
Colleges & Universities
in New York

Strategic Plan

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A Message from the President

Dear Colleagues,

Over the many years of CICU's proud history in the independent sector of higher education, there have undoubtedly been thoughtful discussions about the organization's future. The Executives preceding me as well as former and current Board members are excellent practitioners in their field who have made significant contributions to our work and our legacy.

In thinking about what I wanted to share with you about my goals for a successful strategic plan and the future of our organization, I stumbled on a resounding example in an unlikely place: While watching a documentary on the issue of the pay gap in professional sports, I was struck by a statement made by a female athlete who has been particularly vocal on the issue of pay disparity. Asked by a journalist whether her passion for ensuring women get paid as much as men who compete in the same sport was not simply a pursuit of her own interests, or an effort made on her own behalf to increase her and her teammates' salaries, she replied, "This isn't about me. I am doing this for the players who will come after me. This is about making things better for the next generation."

This struck me as a defining moment for why we would engage in a deliberate strategic planning process: The very process is more about working towards a collective future – and less about the success of any one program or person. Like each of you, I want CICU (Commission of Independent Colleges and Universities) to evolve, adapt, and continue to succeed. This process and the subsequent plan outlined here, creates a roadmap to shape and guide CICU's organizational purpose, give clarity to what we do and why we do it, and more importantly, reflects our commitment to a shared vision of the future.

Our strategic work, as outlined in this document, is designed to ensure that our success is not only impactful, but collective - shared across and enriched by every department, employee, Board member and stakeholder. This year's plan and our annual commitment to its renewal will lead to consistent, deliberate, and meaningful impact of CICU through changing times.

I look forward to continuing this valuable and productive work together.

In partnership,

Lola W. Brabham, President

Executive Summary

CICU's strategic planning process is focused on aligning our work with our resources, and reinvigorating our commitment to our vision, mission, and values. The process requires input and involvement from all parts of the organization to fully assess the current state and take deliberate steps towards a desired future. When conducted effectively, the process creates an ongoing feedback mechanism that enables focus, flexibility, and growth.

By engaging in a comprehensive strategic planning process with guidance from new leadership, CICU has developed innovative ways to perform requisite business activities while enhancing the current state and positioning for future performance.

The strategic planning process at CICU is ongoing and collaborative.

The key deliverable is an annual strategic plan that captures and communicates critical elements, including organizational mission, goals, actions necessary to achieve those goals, and measures for determining whether improved performance is being achieved.

Assessment	of organizational environment, external environments through SWOT analyses, stakeholder discussions.
Development	of vision, mission, values and goals.
Prioritization	of activities and objectives, and appropriate measures.

The analysis of our environment and resulting prioritization of work will continue to evolve each year; our goals, mission and values remain fixed and represent our organization's tenured history in the sector.

A phased approach to aligning our resources and reinvigorating our commitment to our vision, mission, and values.

Vision, Mission, and Values

Throughout CICU's seven-decade history, the organization has achieved prominence in the field of higher education for its strong commitment to membership institutions and resilience during changing and challenging times. While our body of work has evolved, our aspirational purpose, principles, and beliefs have remained steadfast. In developing the organization's first ever strategic plan, our drive to succeed today and into the future is as notable now as it was almost 70 years ago, and the same vision guides our way.

Vision
Improve quality of life through higher education.

Mission
Provide opportunity and access to higher education through fairness, equity, and humanity.

Values
Advocacy, Opportunity, Choice, and Excellence.

SWOT Analysis

A traditional SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis will be used to assess how our internal capabilities as an organization match our external business environment, and how key characteristics of our current state can be leveraged into future achievement. The analysis will be conducted in two phases: The first phase focuses on the internal environment of the organization; the second on our external business environment, including our members, Board, and stakeholders.

The goal of the analysis is two-fold: To clarify and organize our purpose, and to align that purposeful work with desired success. The approach is also designed to engage our team on a deeper level, ensuring a clear connection between the day-to-day work of our staff, the environment, and entities we engage with, and CICU's organizational capabilities.

The first phase of analysis resulted in a list of urgent, internal priorities that were used to create strategies for the current year, helping to better align what we do with the resources we currently have. As we move into the next phase of external assessments, CICU will gather information about issues and events and their relationship to and/or impact on our internal and external environments to help management determine the future direction of the organization.

The results of our analysis for the current year are highlighted in Figures 1 and 2. Subsequent years' analyses will reflect data collected from external partners and stakeholders.

Internal Analysis Results

strengths	weaknesses
High capability	
• High-quality programs and services	• Functional job roles and responsibilities need clarity
• Policy experts and sector authority	• Resources not dedicated to business improvement
• Access to relevant data	• Lack of organizational and succession planning
• Flexibility of team and staff	
• Familiarity with challenges facing sector	
• Passionate leadership	
Lower	

Figure 1

SWOT Analysis, continued

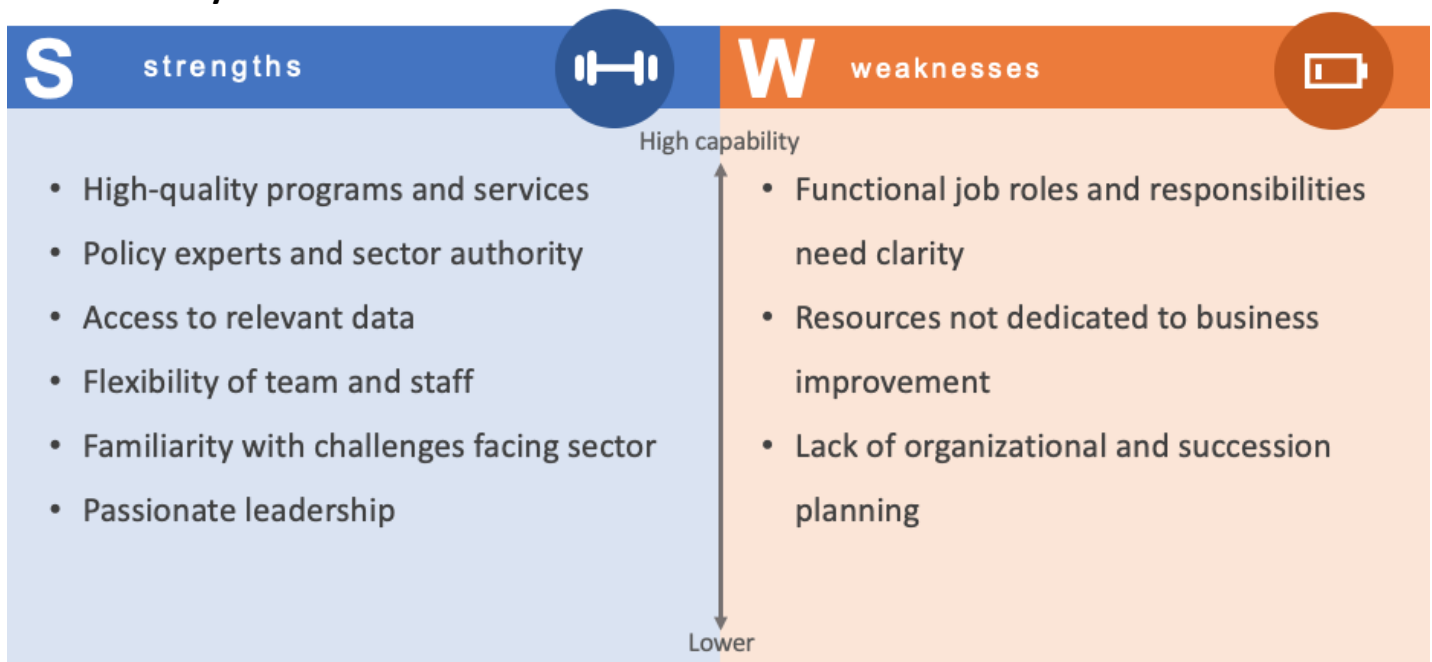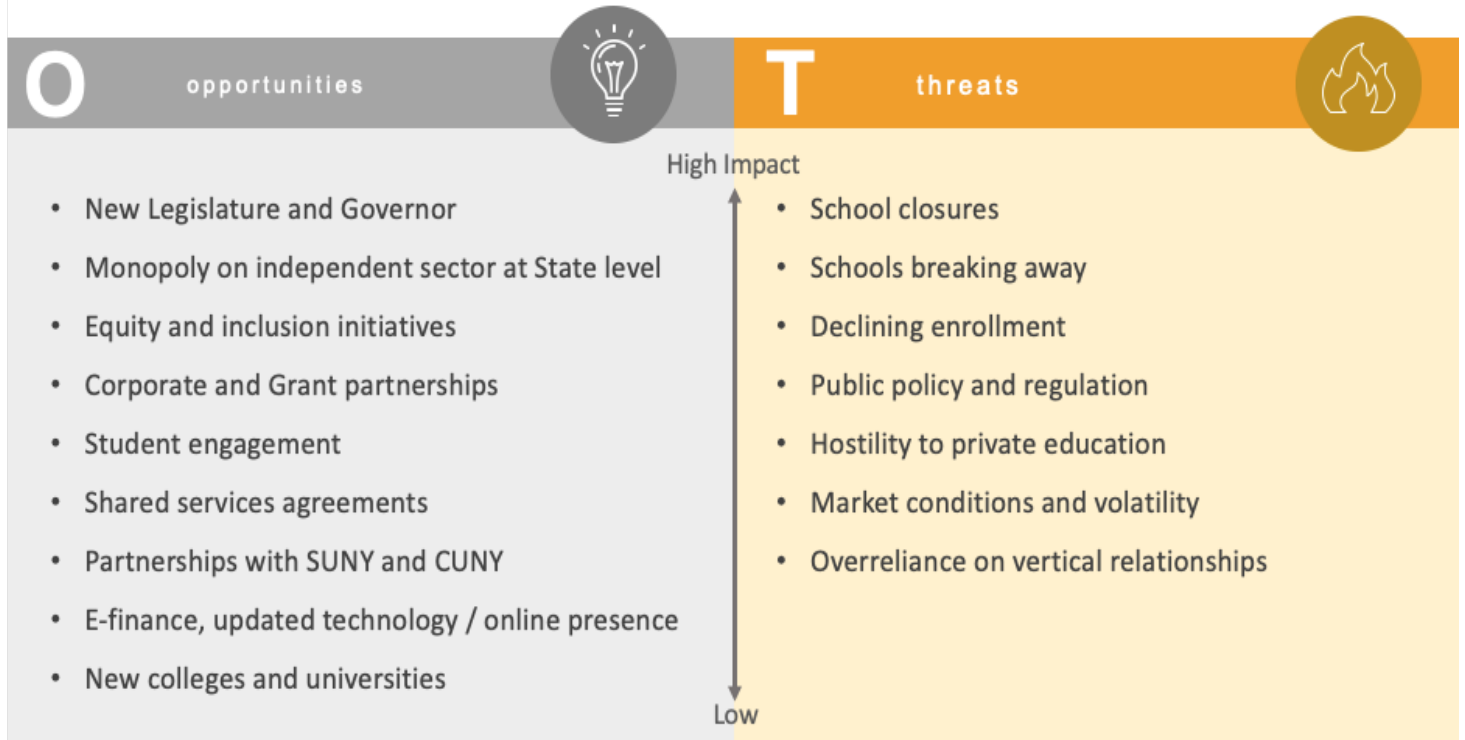| O opportunities	T threats
High Impact	
• New Legislature and Governor	• School closures
• Monopoly on independent sector at State level	• Schools breaking away
• Equity and inclusion initiatives	• Declining enrollment
• Corporate and Grant partnerships	• Public policy and regulation
• Student engagement	• Hostility to private education
• Shared services agreements	• Market conditions and volatility
• Partnerships with SUNY and CUNY	• Overreliance on vertical relationships
• E-finance, updated technology / online presence	
• New colleges and universities	
Low	

Figure 2

Strategic Pillars

In developing our strategic focus for the coming and future years, CICU identified four distinct support systems - or pillars - that provide structure and stability for our organization in both the current and future state. Each pillar represents a broad theme and is also critical to the success of day-to-day operations and functional business areas within CICU. An accompanying, long-term strategic goal was developed to ground the work of the organization within each pillar and offers a longitudinal perspective on our achievements over the next 3 years. Data from the SWOT Analysis were also considered in creating and establishing the Pillars.

The first pillar represents CICU's commitment to exceptional quality in the programs and services we provide our member institutions. Meeting our membership's needs through efficient service delivery characterized by knowledge, advocacy and empathy is a vital part of our work. The second pillar reflects the efficiency and effectiveness of our internal business activities. This includes financial stewardship, human resources, technology, employee learning and training, and a culture of progress. The third pillar is value-based as well as strategic. Our commitment to diversity and equity is fueled by our work in the independent sector, where we advocate and pursue inclusivity and equality in educational access and opportunities. The fourth and final pillar represents our relationships, outreach activities and external priorities. This encompasses branding, community and public relations, social and digital media presence, and communication.

Pillar 1. Superior Customer Service	Pillar 2. Operational Excellence	Pillar 3. Equity & Inclusion	Pillar 4. Partnership & Collaboration
Be proactive and responsive. Go above and beyond in each interaction to deliver value for our members and other stakeholders.	*Level-set the organization for success.* Create a culture of continuous improvement by embracing a problem-solving mindset guided by effective leadership and management principles, and a strong sense of teamwork.	*Establish equity and inclusion as core values.* Adopt an equity-mindset that calls attention to the impact of inequity in student outcomes and advances equity-achieving programs and practices to ensure success for all students.	*Build connections among key stakeholders.* Pursue strategic and tactical goals to achieve the largest potential impact for member institutions and the students they serve.

Goals and Activities

A set of strategic goals was developed under each pillar, along with annual operating activities to accomplish in this first year. A select set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be used for tracking progress, communicating results, informing adjustments or changes, and celebrating success.

Pillar 1. Superior Customer Service
Strategic Goals
1. Establish and document standards for service quality levels across programs.
2. Develop programmatic policy and procedure to ensure accountability, consistency, and clear requirements for service delivery.
3. Develop feedback mechanisms for members to share satisfaction and areas of concern regarding service.
4. Differentiate our programs and services by member segment.
5. Enhance engagement initiatives and opportunities across the membership.

Annual Operating Activities

1. Conduct and document a membership analysis using existing data to identify main CICU 'market' segments - group our membership by size, type and needs to target programmatic support and partnerships.
2. Produce and distribute a summary fact sheet for each member segment offering solutions and assistance regarding enrollment trends as indicated in the 2021 Annual Enrollment Survey.
3. Develop and distribute the first annual Voice of the Customer Survey to collect data on service and program quality, expertise, response time and satisfaction.
4. Present 2022 legislative strategies to membership for input and buy-in during the 2022 Annual meeting.
5. Dedicate an annual event forum for legislative initiative discovery and consensus. Invite legislative contacts to attend parts of the Annual Conference.

Key Performance Indicators	Baseline	Target	2022
Membership analysis by segment (%)	10%	100%	37%
Planned events/forums for legislative discovery and strategy (#)	--	3	19
Enrollment summary and solutions packages developed for membership segments (%)	5%	80%	100%
Voice of the Customer Overall Rating (out of 5)	--	4	4.75

Pillar 2. Operational Excellence

Strategic Goals

1. Engage technology solutions that enable consistent, collaborative access to information and resources.
2. Reorganize staff reporting structure by operational area and clarify roles and responsibilities.
3. Encourage peer review as a mechanism for information sharing and process improvement.
4. Develop performance objectives for all service delivery roles to track outcomes.
5. Establish internal controls program to discover and monitor functional capabilities and weaknesses.
6. Offer ongoing training and development opportunities to staff on statutorily required topics as well as general interest areas.

Annual Operating Activities

1. Audit technology infrastructure to determine gaps, needs, and issues and initiate replacement solutions.
2. Deploy Office 365 for better/faster sharing and collaboration on documents and content management use.
3. Conduct trainings and create resources to support staff in maintaining deadlines and requirements and to reduce errors in reporting.
4. Establish system of internal control and develop accompanying program of review.
5. Create job descriptions and performance objectives for all Vice President level positions.
6. Develop succession plans for all critical positions.
7. Create and pilot new onboarding program for new employees.
8. Develop a new structure for employee resources and revise the Employee Handbook.
9. Publish new mission statement on the website and begin to use in all print materials including fact sheets.

Key Performance Indicators for CY 2021 - 22	Baseline	Target	2022
Percent of technology infrastructure audited (%)	30%	80%	100%
Technology projects completed on time (#)	--	4	2
Number of critical positions with succession plans in place	--	2	1
Number of internal control reviews completed	--	4	4
Average time to fully onboard new employee	90 days	30 days	1 day

Pillar 3. Equity & Inclusion
Strategic Goals
1. Achieve commitment and buy-in from the Board on equity and inclusion outcomes.
2. Develop and foster relationships with Chief Diversity Officers (CDO) or equivalent at membership schools.
3. Establish a public-facing stance on equity and inclusion as a basis for the culture and business activity at CICU.
4. Engage in relationships that improve the visibility of our commitment to equity and inclusion.
5. Address policies and obstacles openly and transparently.

Annual Operating Activities

1. Conduct focus groups with CDO or equivalent at member institutions or partner organizations to create shared goals, strategies, and meaningful action around equity and inclusion.
2. Create and increase support for opportunity and equity within the organization.
3. Establish formal accountability measures for improved diversity and equitable organizational practices in each functional area.
4. Engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) development coaching with management and staff to increase awareness and commitment.
5. Develop a Diversity Statement to be included in all written and digital materials, including Affiliate and Collaborative partner agreements.

Key Performance Indicators for CY 2021 - 22	Baseline	Target	2022
Percentage of functional areas with improved diversity on their teams. (%)	10%	100%	50%
Percentage of staff who receive training on equity, inclusion, bias, and/or other diversity components of workplace.	--	50%	75%

Pillar 4. Partnerships and Collaboration

Strategic Goals

1. Develop and execute brand and reputation strategies with involvement and input from Board members.

2. Align with partners who have similar goals and alliances to increase impact and strengthen our connections to the community.

3. Foster relationships and explore new partnerships across and among all higher education institutions.

4. Coordinate outreach to philanthropic, private, and grant funding sources to explore cooperative opportunities.

5. Improve visibility and brand recognition to consistently secure a seat at the policy-making table.

6. Maintain ongoing communication with and recognition of our members and their achievements.

Annual Operating Activities

1. Partner with strategic communications and marketing firm to revise and modernize our web presence and improve brand management and messaging outlets.
2. Implement consistent branding across the business, including written and digital materials and social media platforms.
3. Use print and digital media outlets to regularly highlight partnerships with individual members.
4. Identify opportunities for joint action and combining efforts or resources with other likeminded entities, including government, non-profit and private sector organizations with interest / stake in independent higher education community.
5. Utilize social media to market successful collaborations and promote the needs of the independent sector.
6. Schedule and commit to regular visits to member schools to discuss current challenges and opportunities.
7. Invite non-member or external experts to membership events when appropriate, to broaden collective understanding and awareness of trends, resources, and solutions.
8. Engage in cyclical grant research and application processes.

Key Performance Indicators	Baseline	Target	2022
Highlighted partnerships on social media (#)	5	25	83
Funding streams or sources sought / applied for (including grants, private) (#)	1	4	2
Membership event participants reporting learning new information / connections (%)	--	80%	69%
Leads generated for joint action / combined efforts with external partners (#)	--	5	8

SUMMARY

The shaping of CICU's first formalized Strategic Plan relies on a participative approach, calling for input from across the organization while focusing on key accomplishments and realistic goal setting. Each employee, manager and Executive is responsible for this plan - not only for the achievement of the goals set forth within, but for the very creation and value of the plan's components.

In the coming months, while using the plan as a guide, CICU will demonstrate a connection between our strategic goals and ground-level work. This alignment will be monitored and tracked frequently, with progress assessments conducted and communicated quarterly across the organization. The clarity and specificity provided by goal alignment and tracking will help CICU determine our level of impact on our Board, members, partners, and stakeholders. The tangible proof of any meaningful or effective strategy is the delivery of change and success. This plan and concurrent annual revisions will serve as a powerful and credible tool for shaping and guiding the organization through times of change and toward success, now and into the future.