



Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships

Strategic Partnerships Tabletop Exercises

The purpose of these tabletop exercises is to identify situations where strategic partnerships are extremely important to solve a problem, reach a goal or manage a situation. There are times where relationships can develop during a process (serving on a committee) or times when it is necessary that the relationship is already in place (navigating a crisis situation). There are unspoken campus politics that can dictate who decision makers are or who are seen as respected voices. This may be challenging for new professionals (who lack experience in this arena) or people in new professional roles (who haven't had time to identify key constituents).

The Future of the Profession Imperative that focuses on Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships highlights the need to cultivate strong partnerships between HRL professionals and others. This can be a learned skill. The group developed scenarios that can be used as tabletop exercises for entry and mid-level professionals to gain practice in building relationships with campus partners, which includes recognizing and managing politics.

Exercise Goals

Participating in these exercises will facilitate numerous improvements throughout a department. These include:

- increasing understanding and knowledge of university culture;
- creating a plan for identifying campus partners and building relationships;
- understanding personal strengths and ability to influence others; and
- practicing reflection, application, and revision of skills

How to Use Exercises

1. **Define Strategic and Aspirational Relationships**
Who are the people within your department, the division, and the university that you need to work with or that you can learn from? Use the exercises to identify these people, particularly when they may not be obvious.
2. **Define Sociogram**
Map specific individuals in your social dynamic and professional relationships. See more specific information below.
3. **Practical Use Staff Guide**
Any of these tabletop situations can be used in a staff meeting or in personal reflection. Specific uses for each are suggested and intended to build relationships or knowledge in advance of the possible scenario. They are divided into three sections where relationships are key: crisis/incident management; campus decision-making and professional development.
4. **Personal Reflection**
This space allows for self-reflection and analysis of strengths and areas for growth.
5. **Observation and Discovery**
What was surprising? What are unknown answers? How would I respond differently if I had more time? Who can help me learn? What relationships or partnerships need to be developed by me?
6. **Variables**
While we cannot predict everything that can happen, what are common variables to consider? What has history shown us (particularly in the pandemic) that we need to be prepared for? What are trends (such as the enrollment cliff) that we need to prepare for and have a Plan B?



7. Recount Scenario/Evaluation

At the end, there are general questions that can be applied to any reflection regarding strategic partnerships.

Helpful Resource

From the group's collective experience, a sociogram is a great tool to use to begin this exploration. A sociogram is a tool for charting relationships. It is a "visual representation of the social links and preferences that each person has." (from www.6seconds.org). Sociograms are often used in classroom learning. In this context, it is suggested that a professional lists campus collaborators, identifies their departments/areas (including titles), articulates the ways they interact/work with your department and describes how they best support one another. Here is an example:

- *I am Sue Smith, Associate Director of Housing and Residence Life. I am responsible for serving on the Behavior Intervention Team (BIT) on behalf of our department. I review incident reports and meet with staff that have interactions of actual or potential self-harm or harm against others. I work with Larry Lewis, Associate Director of Public Safety. Larry also serves on the BIT team and trains officers on how to respond to students (and other members of the campus community) that are experiencing a mental health crisis. The BIT teams meet weekly and discuss alarming incident reports, any campus, local or national event coming up that may impact our students and share data on student behavior. Recently, Larry and I shared an article that came from IACLEA (International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators) on best practices on patrolling techniques near and in residence halls. In addition to regular BIT meetings, I invite Larry to have lunch with me and another staff member (rotating) in one of our dining halls each month. We have an informal conversation about any additional trends or items of interest that may go beyond our BIT meetings. Larry supports me by sending me articles and data he received and highlights interesting or important things. I support him by introducing him to the hall directors so that he is comfortable reaching out to them if I am not available.*

Scenarios (by topical area)

Crisis/Incident Response:

- **Crisis Management:** There was an extremely large gathering in an off-campus area populated by students last night. There were easily 1000+ students or people gathered, including many of your residents. SnapChat messages surfaced that someone flashed a gun. Everyone in the area fled. Thankfully no one was hurt, and no one has shared that they physically saw the gun. The street is littered with debris. The local news is on their way to campus. You received a phone call at 3:00 am in the morning and have been up since gathering details. The VPSA wants an update from the crisis team at 10:00 am before she is interviewed by the local news.
 - *Suggested use: 1) schedule an hour for your leadership team to discuss your chain of command and how you can quickly disseminate information to the appropriate people in any crisis. Identify gaps in important relationships; 2) devote an hour of a staff retreat to discuss this scenario and highlight all of the campus partners (and potentially community partners) that are involved in this type of situation; 3) offer to host members of law enforcement and/or the crisis management team to use this as a tabletop exercise. Add details specific to your campus and add realistic 'injects' throughout the discussion to foster cooperation and knowledge sharing.*
- **Health & Wellbeing:** You received your campus data from the Healthy Minds survey. It showed a decline in student self-reported wellbeing. Every area that reports to Health & Wellbeing is understaffed. Your staff is responsible for responding to crises and concerns that happen after hours and are feeling particularly burdened with the amount and breadth of calls they've received.
 - *Suggested use: 1) Ask the Director of Health & Wellbeing to a staff meeting to present the information to your staff and how you can work together to identify students that truly need*

referral and those that may benefit from extra support and resources that can be delivered in the halls; 2) Ask a faculty member with a specialty in this area to meet with your staff and provide training on how to effectively facilitate difficult discussions with students that are struggling; 3) Request divisional funding to train staff on Mental Health First Aid (or similar) and invite others on campus to participate to help take the burden directly off your staff. This could be particularly effective with groups such as athletes or fraternities/sororities that also have dedicated support.

- **Understanding of Student Development:** The Director of Facilities Management has reported an increase in Exit sign damage in all buildings, but particularly the residence halls. Your response is to utilize your community standards process and floor meetings to address the behavior. However, no one has come forward to take responsibility for the damage. The Director of Facilities management has gone to the Vice President of Finance and the President to articulate that you do not care about the financial implications of the damage. The Vice President for Student Affairs is to respond during a cabinet meeting next week.
 - *Suggested use: 1) Invite the Director of Facilities Management to serve on a panel at a RHA meeting to discuss the importance of building safety; 2) Have the Vice President for Student Affairs invite the Vice President of Finance to a divisional retreat of Student Affairs Directors to have a dialogue about the costs of maintaining buildings and how to educate students on how this impacts their tuition and fees; 3) Meet with the Director of Community Standards to ensure your process matches with the broader student conduct process and how to consistently adjudicate similar cases.*
- **Staff Wellbeing / Workforce Sustainability:** Your team has been working through an unusually high amount of crisis for your campus. There were over 45 duty calls this week. Emergency housing for students is at capacity due to a flood last week. Someone is out due to a family emergency and staff have taken on additional duties to cover while they are out. There is an unusual amount of student conduct cases due to a large party that occurred off campus involving many residential students. The students destroyed a public venue, ripped off the sinks, flooded the toilets, and left trash everywhere. There was a suicide attempt last night by a member of your student staff.
 - *Suggested use: 1) Invite the Director of Human Resources to meet with you and your leadership team to discuss the hiring process and how you can quickly fill positions while completing the proper hiring steps; 2) Take time during your summer training to cross-train staff that can fill in if someone is sick or is out for an extended period of time; 3) During the summer, train faculty members that can sit on conduct committees to adjudicate multiple violations; 4) Regularly meet with the Director of the Student Union and Director of Recreation Services to discuss contingency plans for a housing crisis if additional dining or shower services are needed.*

Department/Campus Leadership:

- **P3 Partnership:** You have been tasked to implement a housing master plan and review options moving forward for how to fund new housing on campus. You have been given 9 months to complete the plan. It is September, and you and your team are to present your plan to the Board of Trustees at their June meeting. You are to include members from business affairs (including the budget office, the contracts office and the facilities office), a member from both the RHA and the faculty senate. You can also include three additional members of your staff – one from housing facilities, one from residence life and one from dining. You have also been giving ¼ time of a support staff member in the VPSA's office so that your administrative assistant isn't taken away from their current responsibilities.
 - *Suggested use: 1) Set up a quarterly meeting with the Director of Budgets to review your auxiliary budget and reserves and discuss how these fit into the broader university budget goals; 2) Subscribe to NACUBO and any distribution lists. Share their magazine and newsletters with your budget staff. Begin dialogue with peers in the finance office if there are articles or practices that are relevant to your campus. Offer to share resources from ACUHO-I; 3) Subscribe to resources from partners such as Greystar, Perkins & Will and Huron Consulting Group to understand trends and latest features. Share*

interesting information with colleagues in facilities and finance; 4) Determine who served on the last housing master plan. If any of those committee members are still on campus, set up time to discuss what was successful and any pitfalls to avoid.

- **University Wide Committee:** You are tasked with chairing the University celebration of a new residence hall that will open on your campus. You have been at the institution for about a month. The building is named after a prominent graduate of the institution. This residence hall is of special importance because of the LEAD certification and other eco-friendly features of the building. You have two months until the event. You run a self-operating dining service and the director is a peer on your leadership team. How does this change if you are not chairing the committee and asked to serve as the Student Development representative?
 - *Suggested use: 1) If you regularly host campus-wide events, invite the president's assistant or event planner and the Director of Food Service to meet twice per year. Discuss the preferences of the president and any individuals that need to be consulted for major events; 2) Study the LEAD requirements and ask the Director of Facilities for a private tour of LEAD certified facilities to expand your knowledge; 3) Identify key campus leaders (faculty, coaches, development officers, admissions staff) for a private tours for new buildings and renovations so they can help 'sell' to the public.*
- **Selected to Lead Change:** You have been selected to chair a committee to review the current housing assignment process with the goal of the committee implementing change to meet student needs. Your student demographics have changed dramatically over the past three years since your office of admissions has increased the number of out-of-state students. There are a number of staff on the committee who do not see a problem with the process remaining the same and have positional authority greater than you (and have been at the institutions for decades). The Dean of Students selected you because of your ability to connect with students and truly understand their housing and community needs. How do you begin this process?
 - *Suggested Use: 1) Meet once per semester with the Director of Admissions to discuss incoming class projections, including demographic or geographic trends; 2) Share data on student trends regularly with staff and ask to lead a 5-minute discussion in each staff meeting on an interesting fact, trend or data point; 3) Ask for notes for the assignment process in the past and determine what worked well and what did not. 4) Consult with StarRez (or similar) on any new features that could assist you in your process and make sure you understand and can articulate this change.*
- **Institutional Governance:** As a part of shared governance, there is a subcommittee that includes two representatives from the Faculty Senate, the University Senate and the Student Senate. You have been a representative from Student Affairs to the University Senate for a year. You have now been selected to serve on this subcommittee. What steps will you take to understand the goal of this committee and your role in accomplishing that goal?
 - *Suggested use: 1) Attend an open Faculty Senate meeting during the semester. See who people truly listen to. Listen for any topics that are regularly coming up as important to faculty; 2) Volunteer if there is a campus-wide opportunity, such as a discussion leader for a freshman book read or a day of service. Try and volunteer with someone in a different division; 3) In staff meeting, take a few minutes to review remarks from freshman convocation or similar and other public remarks from the university president to identify campus priorities and discuss how you and your team can contribute.*
- **Student Staff Selection:** You are excited to facilitate a process for student staff selection. You've been working with a group to identify your goals and create new strategies to identify candidates that meet qualifications. The Dean of Students stops by the committee meeting. They disagree with this new direction and suggest that you and your team should take it in a different direction. They inform you that regardless of their interview, you must hire Sam Student. They are the child of a prominent donor. Sam Student bombed the interview.
 - *Suggested use: 1) Meet with your team prior to interviews on how to coach students into the roles that best fit their skills and talents; 2) Attend sessions hosted by Human Resources on how to set up and conduct quality interviews; 3) Preemptively meet with the Vice President of Student Affairs and*

Dean of Students early in the year to discuss your staffing needs, process for selection and overview of training.

- **Leadership Change:** It is January, and the Director of Housing and Residence Life has left the University to take a new position. While there is a national search for the position, all of the direct reports have been asked to take on additional responsibilities. You are now tasked with managing the budget for the department and have little experience with this work. You will have access to the administrative assistant that reports to the Director. You have a very good relationship with your former boss, who has told you to call her if you need help. What if your former boss left on poor terms and you did not have a good relationship?
 - *Suggested use: 1) Ask to shadow different members of the HRL staff throughout the course of the academic year to get a better understanding of roles and responsibilities; 2) During training, develop a list of questions for discussion that help provide a full understanding of the scope of the department and who is responsible for what; 3) Sign up for the student affairs certification and attend training sessions on various aspects of the Core and CHRL domains.*

Professional and Personal Development:

- **Beginning a New Job:** You have taken a new job at a larger institution with more bed spaces. Your new role is a promotion from your last position. You have a bigger budget, more direct reports and greater responsibilities on your position description. How do you begin to understand the workplace culture and the context for your role? How would you approach this if you were promoted to a new role in a new department at your current institution? Do you ask different questions? Develop different partnerships or relationships? How can you 're-invent' yourself professionally?
 - *Suggested use: 1) At regional meetings, seek out colleagues at aspirational institutions and ask them about their position. Include questions about campus climate and unique politics; 2) Make a list of your strengths and areas of improvement. For the areas of improvement, brainstorm how you can become more proficient; 3) Think about how you would describe your own campus to an outsider. What questions would they have? How would you break down information into digestible pieces? Use that to formulate the things you would want to know about a new environment.*
- **Campus / Workplace Politics:** You are joining a team that has worked together for 10+ years. You overhear your supervisor and another colleague discussing a situation involving another colleague and it is not in a positive light.
 - *Suggested use: 1) In interview prep, ask multiple people about the collegial environment and how members of the team support each other; 2) In a position search, seek out colleagues that have worked there previously and ask about work culture; 3) Read books and articles on how to develop a positive work environment in an era of negativity.*
- **Career Advancement:** You have completed one job as a hall director. You are in your second role as a hall director at a new institution. You love working in residence life, but you recognize that you would like to consider an Assistant Director role or live-off role. You also have an interest in pursuing the student affairs certification as a professional development goal. You need one more year to meet the experience requirement.
 - *Suggested use: 1) Seek opportunities to present programs at regional conferences as a way to highlight your skill set; 2) Ask to shadow an Assistant Director on your staff to fully understand the position responsibilities; 3) Volunteer for open spots on professional development committees within the department or division and observe how people improve their skills.*

Personal Reflection

1. Have I thoughtfully identified my strengths and my areas of growth? How do these apply to relationships and partnerships across campus?
2. If I do not have the opportunity to participate in personal/professional development or talk through these scenarios in my current role, how can I develop relationships in the field to improve my skills?

Department or University Cultural Observation & Discovery

- **Discover**
Make an intentional effort to listen and observe in meetings. Who is speaking? What are they saying? How do people respond? Why do they respond that way? What do they do or say that influences the culture?
- **Create a University Cultural Sociogram**
Using your list of campus collaborators, identify their areas and titles, the ways they interact or work with your department, and how they support one another.
- **Articulate your Observations**
From your observation, what are the strengths or opportunities that exist? How can you work towards supporting the strengths or advancing the opportunities? Identify someone to process these observations to provide you feedback.
- **Discuss Observations with Supervisors and Colleagues**
Be open to their feedback and observations.

Variables to consider or analyze

- **Campus specific context.**
What variables should you consider about this situation, or the partnerships given your institutional context?
- **Wildcard - Something unexpected happens.**
How does the scenario change if something unexpected happens or a key leader is not present?
- **Identify the threats.**
Reflect back to what you need to be successful. Are there opportunities you should reconsider?
- **Consider how the outcome may change based on different possible decisions, different populations served, and different resources available.**

Evaluation & Response

- **Follow-up**
 - What happens next?
 - What are your next steps?
- **Reflect on your plan and your influence.**
 - Were you successful?
 - Who else should you get to know?
 - How can you increase the value of your influence and voice?