

October 2018: Newsletter



Sonoma State University's Blueprint for Success

We love what we do at Leap Solutions—especially when we get to do it in partnership with a local institution we greatly admire. So we have been thrilled to engage with Sonoma State University (SSU), throughout the 2017-18 school year and continuing, on a comprehensive process to share, shape and unite around a new strategic plan that has set the course for the university for years to come.

Why Leap?

Eager to build the university's future with intention, Sonoma State leaders looked to Leap Solutions to guide them in developing a relevant and dynamic strategic plan that would reflect changing circumstances and put their university on the path to purposeful action and success.

With Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Lisa Vollendorf leading the charge, we began our preliminary strategic planning with SSU in mid-September of 2017 and aimed to finish in May 2018. Our progress was temporarily derailed by the devastating North Bay firestorm in October, as SSU shifted gears to serve as a critical support center for fire response and relief efforts. We were able to reconvene in November, when we put together a stellar planning committee made up of key faculty, staff, student and community members.

Leap Solutions assumed a vital role as change agent for SSU. We brought to their strategic planning process not only seasoned guidance, discipline and efficiency, but invaluable objectivity, transparency and inclusivity. Leap stressed the value in reaching beyond the walls of SSU by giving voice to anyone and everyone the university might touch, including faculty, staff, students, alumni and parents as well as supporters and donors, industry colleagues, community groups and business members. We helped SSU articulate their needs and hopes, solicit buy-in and build consensus among stakeholders, and identify and work to the strengths of the university's culture. Perhaps most importantly, we challenged SSU to rethink assumptions, broaden perspectives and advance fresh ideas.



A Proven Process

Together, SSU and Leap launched the planning process with a thorough assessment of SSU's past and current state. We discussed our intentions and reviewed existing planning and organizational documents. Between Leap's proven tools and techniques for collecting valuable data and the planning team's unusually creative approach to outreach, we managed to galvanize more than 4,000 people to participate in the process! We amassed an incredible amount of data points through the powerful survey tool Qualtrics, World Cafés, board meetings, community meetings with business and industry leaders and planning sessions. Leap skillfully organized, analyzed and distilled that data into a true, comprehensive view of SSU's unique strengths and limitations and presented the planning team with a full understanding of the realities, challenges and opportunities facing the university today.

Informed, grounded and empowered by that knowledge and insight, the planning team was then ready to strategize with Leap: to hone SSU's new mission, vision and values and to establish and polish university priorities. Along the way, key initiatives, tactical objectives and critical success factors emerged. Altogether, these formed the core of SSU's focused and highly effective new strategic plan.

A Powerfully Succinct Plan

Our collaboration with Sonoma State illustrates the fact that no matter how big or complex an organization, the best strategic plan is actually very straightforward. It's smart, short, to the point and clearly understandable.

Elements include:

- **Mission:** Quite simply, a mission is a statement of purpose. It captures the essence of an organization and summarizes why it exists. SSU has used their mission in part as a chance to redefine the university as a regional institution.
- **Vision:** A vision statement is how an organization sees the future it seeks to create. It defines what success looks like when the organization's mission is fulfilled. For SSU, the new mission includes serving as a model university and preparing graduates to meet modern challenges and make an impact on the world.
- **Core Values:** An organization's core values, or guiding beliefs, link its mission and vision. SSU lists just four core values, but those values serve as a powerful expression of Sonoma State and a center star to guide all university efforts.
- **Strategic Priorities:** Strategic priorities are overarching organizational goals to be addressed by the organization as it implements its strategic plan. Again, SSU only lists four, but those four are spelled out in detail, complete with supporting themes, and they serve as a clear road map for putting SSU's strategic plan into action.

Completed by early May 2018 and endorsed by President Judy K. Sakaki on June 1, 2018, SSU's entire strategic plan is just three pages long. However, those few pages showcase a full and inspiring picture of Sonoma State today through 2025, and they allow everyone reading the plan to know how they fit into that picture and how they can each contribute to the university's success.



Working the Plan

With SSU's new strategic plan in place, it's time for the *really* gratifying part: integrating it into every day and at every level of Sonoma State so that the mission can come alive and the vision can become a reality.

During the fall 2018 semester, each SSU division, school and unit is tasked with forging and rolling out their own plans for making sure their work supports SSU's new strategic plan. To that end, Leap hosted a May 9, 2018, kick-off party, where we recapped the planning process and next steps; established an SSU strategic planning website to share background, updates, notices and victories; and prepared a training guide with fundamental questions and exercises, strategies and planning templates. These tools, along with access to the Leap Solutions team as well as assigned SSU division resource people, are helping each division, school and unit understand and structure the way they support each component of the strategic plan. They're identifying SMART (Smart, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals and tactics to achieve them; designing and using tools for measuring, tracking and reporting their accomplishments; and continually (and, eventually, annually) assessing their progress.

Making an Impact

We're proud to have contributed to a Sonoma State Strategic Plan 2025 that embodies the very spirit and diversity of the university. A living, breathing document that will continue to be developed and refined over time, the plan informs and drives success and ensures that Sonoma State University will thrive—now and well into the future.

Are You Ready to Leap?
