

## How Engaging Is Your Strategic Planning Process?

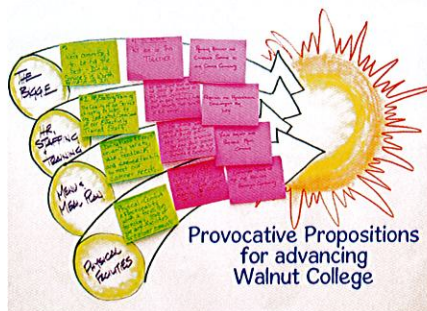
By Bruce Flye, director of planning and partnerships, Brody School of Medicine, East Carolina University; and Lori Mason, director of education, NACUFS

If you ask for volunteers to participate in the design of a new building, you're likely to have plenty of takers, especially if your audience has a stake in it. Imagine asking that same group to help with your next strategic plan. Odds are the response would be much less enthusiastic. Why is that?

One explanation is that building design is generally approached with high expectations that it will be a creative endeavor. By contrast, strategic planning usually involves the non-physical, which conjures up images of boring meetings, wasted time, and professionally-printed three-ring binders that eventually end up on a shelf rather than implemented in any meaningful way.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Instead, strategic planners can learn significant lessons from the more visual process of building design. For example:

- In building design, there is an evident commitment up front: someone believes in what is about to take place, money has been put on the table, and there WILL be results. *Can we say that about most strategic plans?*
- Processes are in place to facilitate creative activity. The selection of designers is based on talent, for example. And the favored mode of communication? Visual images! The best teams "draw" our thoughts and dreams out of us right before our very eyes. *How was your last strategic planning session conducted?*
- The act of construction requires a thorough assessment of context, as it is recognized that the building interacts with and depends upon its immediate environment. Think of what's considered: soils, materials availability, weather patterns, local trades, traffic, and sight lines. *How comprehensive was the environmental scan that you did before developing or updating your last foodservice strategic plan? Did you conduct one?*



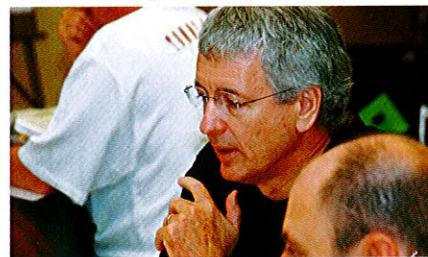
This process is put into practice during the NACUFS Planning Institute. Armed with four-foot-wide rolls of paper, sticky notes, and markers, the foodservice professionals who attend this program participate in a visually engaging process to illustrate a six-step planning model: 1) Sense Making—"Designing the Mess"; 2) Systems Analysis and Idealized Design; 3) Means Planning; 4) Resource Planning; 5) Implementation; and 6) Monitoring.

A variety of creative methods are introduced, including developing a trends analysis by assembling and analyzing a large collage made from magazine clippings, and using fast-paced "brain writing" to quickly seed idea sessions. A deck of oversized cards is used to put visual images in the middle of difficult conversations, create dialogue, and make shared sense of complex challenges. Writing, reflective questions, and group discussions are used to ensure that participants are engaged in both the content and the process.

When designing a building, an architect's sketch, rendering, or model provides a visual representation of what the future building will look like. When it comes to strategic planning, there is no directly observable data about the future; however, by incorporating creative, engaging, and visual graphics into the strategic planning process, a form of reality is created with which one can interact.



ABOVE, LEFT AND RIGHT: Planning Institute participants bring the power of visual imagery to strategic planning.  
BELOW: Bruce Flye



The result will be more volunteers to participate in your next strategic planning process, as well as a meaningful plan that is more likely to be accepted and successfully implemented. ■

*Bruce Flye is a graphic facilitator, bringing the power of imagery to systems thinking, appreciative inquiry, and creative problem solving. He has led workshops in planning practices for the Society of College and University Planning (SCUP) and for NACUFS. In cooperation with SCUP, he helped develop the NACUFS Planning Institute and has served as its primary instructor since the program's inception in 2005. For more on Bruce Flye, visit [www.bruceflye.com](http://www.bruceflye.com).*

*The Planning Institute, held again in June 2011, is one of eight NACUFS professional development programs that address the core competencies identified as critical to success in the collegiate foodservice profession. To learn more, visit [www.nacufs.org](http://www.nacufs.org).*

Photos courtesy of Bruce Flye

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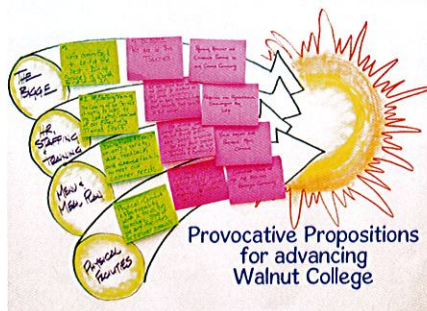
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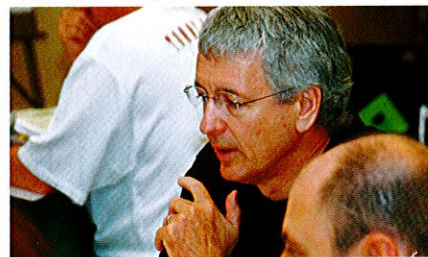
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