HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

FORM

Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal

Institutional Template

The enclosed Quality Initiative Proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the quality improvement requirements of the Open Pathway.

Kerri D Schuiling 8/20/2027

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor *Date*

Kerri D. Schuiling, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Northern Michigan University

Name of Institution

Marquette, MI

City and State

The institution completes the Quality Initiative Proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words. The institution may choose to submit a brief implementation plan or supplemental charts or graphs as appendices to the template. The Quality Initiative Proposal will be accepted beginning September 1 of Year 5. It is due no later than June 1 of Year 7.

Submit the proposal as a PDF file to hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiative" from the list of submission options to ensure the institution's materials are sent to the correct HLC staff member. Submission file names should utilize the following format: QIProposal[InstitutionName][State].pdf (e.g., QIProposalNoNameUniversityMN.pdf). The file name must include the institution's name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.

Project Title: *Northern Michigan University Strategic Planning: Building Effective Long-Term Institutional Planning Processes*

Project Context: In academic year 2021-22 NMU began an intensive process of examining all existing strategic planning materials when our Board of Trustees and new President determined that a refresh was needed. In a time of instability (with a global pandemic disrupting social structures, demographic changes shifting traditional college-age populations, remote study and work transforming education, etcetera), NMU leadership determined that the plans on the books described a great deal of the work happening at the institution, but were insufficiently clear, specific, assessable, and, most importantly, actionable. The Institutional Effectiveness office led work across campus distilling from the existing planning documents five focus areas and associated strategies and tactics directed toward meeting the broad goals of what we are calling our *2022 Interim Strategic Plan*, approved by the Board of Trustees April 28, 2022.

One of the many reasons the Board of Trustees and NMU leadership prioritized development of a strong interim strategic plan is the importance of presenting a forward-looking institution to anyone considering joining the University, including new leadership. The Board has launched a presidential search since the current President who stepped up upon the change of leadership last fall is planning to retire as soon as an effective search can be completed. Applications for NMU President are currently being reviewed, after a preferred deadline for submission of nominations and applications of August 1, 2022. In addition, as a result of shifts caused by the replacement of the former President as well as key retirements and departures, the University will open searches for a Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs and a Chief Diversity Officer soon after a new president arrives. In part in order to attract quality candidates and to effectively inform interested prospective applicants about the core identity of NMU, the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan was constructed and posted publicly (see https://nmu.edu/president/strategic-plan).

Project Description: This Quality Initiative (QI) project is designed to systematize the work of strategic planning at NMU. We will build on the work begun during the process of rapidly deconstructing the prior plan (Investing in Innovation) to replace it with the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan. Work on the interim plan was done on an aggressive timeline. We recognized and were transparent that the need to accelerate the process meant sacrificing ground-upward deep engagement with a wide range of constituents on what are, and should be, NMU's transformational objectives and the strategies that warrant investment to realize that change. That stated, we were successful in quickly engaging faculty, students, staff, and senior administration in the work of distilling the strong elements of the prior plan and adding clear documentation of the specific strategies underway at NMU. Further, the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan includes for each strategy: clearly identified oversight persons, metrics for success, and timeline for completion.

Effectively developing the next generation plan will take intentional community engagement at a much deeper level than what we employed in the rapidly-completed interim planning process. In contrast to the process for the interim plan of solidifying short-term goals and metrics by pulling apart extant materials and documenting what NMU is currently doing, the next stage of planning work will need extensive engagement to appropriately establish the long-term, transformational, continuing and/or new objectives NMU needs to focus on to strategically plan to meet the future. We will use the QI to amplify that work as we create lasting structures to make effective planning just what the name states – strategic.

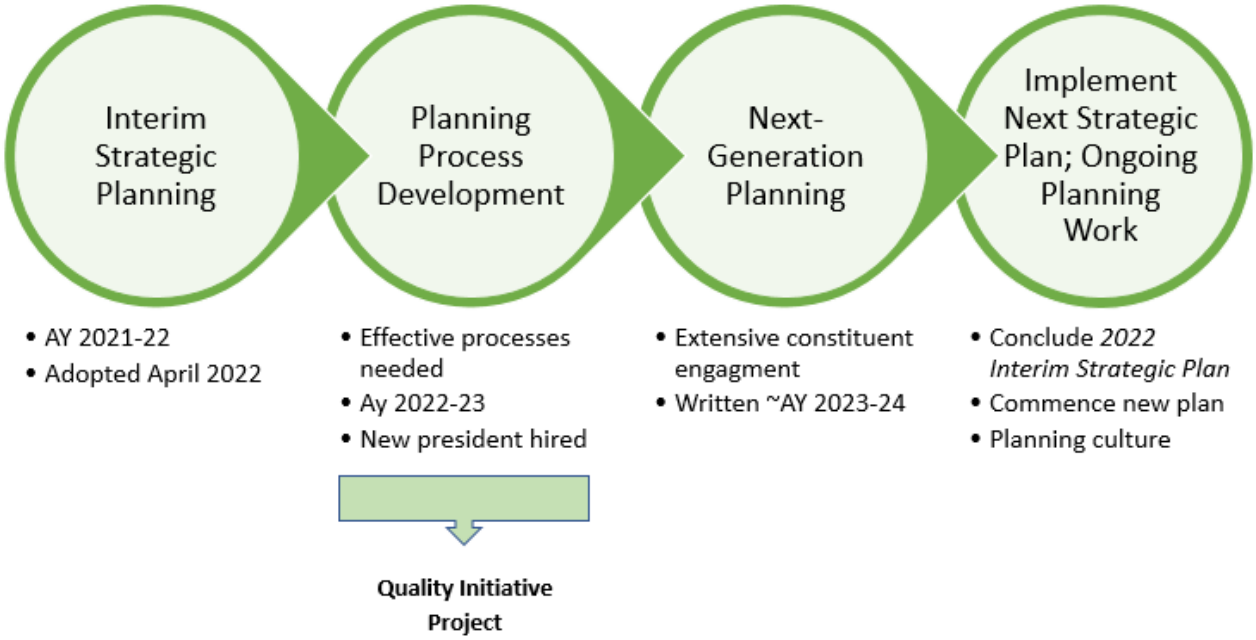
The primary objective of our QI is to systematically establish the tools and methods we will use to develop future integrated strategic plans. This "next-generation" system will facilitate the construction of a primary guiding document (The Strategic Plan) – built on broad stakeholder involvement – and integrated vertically and horizontally throughout the University structure with the goal of clearly defining NMU's strategic priorities for the planning period. This phase may be known as the "visioning

year." The system will then facilitate the constant review and evaluation of strategies and tactics in order to gauge progress toward goal completion. Ultimately, transparency in goal setting and strategy development will lead to improvements in trust and confidence in decision-making, thus improving the culture and relationship between faculty and administration. These years may be known as "the implementation years."

The scope of work under the QI project will be instrumental in the presidential search process that is currently underway. The University's objective is to prepare strategic planning proposals prior to our next president's appointment so that we are able to present to the incoming chief executive officer well-developed options to consider for approval and implementation. Having this work underway at a high level will help in the presidential search process and transition, allowing an incoming CEO to "hit the ground running" when assuming their new role.

Project Bounds: While our recent focus has been on writing the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan and building the action plans that support it, we have also begun the work of developing the "next-generation" system. This will continue, becoming the focus of institutional attention under the QI, through to the development of a proposal to the new President. This stage of the work will be considered complete once new leadership is satisfied with the contents and methods of the system and ultimately provides approval.

The process of developing the plan won't end as the new plan is implemented, but rather will be ongoing work as the plan is constantly updated and renewed in response to the monitoring of key metrics and the changing higher education landscape.



Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

2. Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.

Like many universities, NMU does not currently have a strong culture of integrated planning. Early in academic year 2021-22 when the Board of Trustees terminated the contract of the University President, a major stated contributing reason was frustration with strategic planning. Strong planning

is essential in order to position the University to thrive in a dynamic environment that will not be friendly to higher education -- with trust in institutions being eroded, a “demographic cliff” facing our home region, recovery from the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic presenting both challenges and opportunities, and more instabilities certain. Because we recognize that having a strong plan in place will be critical and we acknowledge that effective planning is an institutional weakness, rather than jump into writing a new strategic plan prematurely, we will use the period of the current interim plan to work on developing a healthy planning culture; our focus now is on building a strong process.

Developing our *2022 Interim Strategic Plan* was done to put an effective plan in place rapidly, but also with the intention of beginning to shift University culture toward effective planning. For example, we hired a number of students to lead a series of virtual discussion sessions where interested students, faculty, and staff came together via Zoom to give their feedback regarding the draft plan. Prior to these “engagement sessions,” one faculty member and one staff/senior administration member had paired up to lay out each of the five focus areas the Institutional Effectiveness office had distilled from existing strategic plan materials. The stated primary goal of the engagement sessions, generating useful community feedback on the draft strategic plan elements, was successful, but so was the unstated additional objective: taking a first, small, step toward shifting planning to be a collaborative process at NMU. We intend to build on those beginnings of inviting diverse voices across campus to engage with planning as we develop long-term processes that center inviting a wide range of participants to share in the work of charting the University’s course.

3. Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.

Operating effectively under a strong strategic plan will drive improvement of academic quality. NMU’s deep commitment to student-centered teaching and learning will be at the core of all future strategic plans. The difference between an effective strategic plan and “something that sits on a shelf” will be starting the planning process by first focusing attention on a collaborative process of planning for integrated strategic plan development. That essential precursor work will be the QI.

NMU has a strong tradition of shared governance. NMU’s Academic Senate, contractually established in the faculty contract between the University and the AAUP-Northern Michigan University Chapter which represents the majority of NMU faculty, advises and makes recommendations to the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs on matters of faculty-wide concern, communicates items of concern to their respective constituencies, and informs the academic community of issues under consideration. Also, the contract with the Northern Michigan University Faculty Association (affiliated with the Michigan Association of Higher Education-Michigan Education Association-National Education Association) which represents additional NMU faculty, establishes means for shared governance. The work of the QI will capitalize on and nurture contractually-established shared ownership of University operations, including integrated strategic planning. Strategic plans gather dust on shelves when leaders fail to “get buy-in” across constituents, but when plans are developed collaboratively there is no need to “get buy-in” to something everyone already co-owns. Doing ongoing strategic planning work collaboratively across faculty unions and other key constituent groups (including students, employers, and others) will drive academic quality by focusing campus attention on the critical current and emerging issues facing a primarily teaching and learning centered university.

Clarity of the Initiative’s Purpose

4. Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.

Purpose: We have bought time by implementing an interim strategic plan, and we intend to use the period of that short-term plan to work on culture shifting. We recognize that this will be difficult work. Spending time carefully developing planning processes will set us up for success with our next-generation planning work.

Goals, during the QI project:

1. Write a strategic planning process.
2. Vet the process on campus and refine it based on constituent input.
3. Communicate with prospective presidential candidates that NMU is intentionally shifting culture specifically to value integrated strategic planning.
4. Make final revisions to the planning system based on the new President's priorities and leadership style.
5. Obtain campus leadership approval of the planning process.
6. Open next-generation planning work based on the new NMU strategic planning process before the expiration of the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan and submit our QI final report.

Goals, following the QI project:

1. Engage varied constituents in the work of building the next-generation strategic plan based on the approved planning process. Constituents will include at least the following:
    a. Faculty
    b. Students
    c. Staff
    d. Alumni
    e. Community members
    f. Employers
2. Develop a strategic plan that will be ready to implement as the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan reaches completion, and then take that next-generation strategic plan through completion to Board of Trustees approval.
3. Continue implementation of the planning process developed during the QI after the next-generation strategic plan is launched, so that the plan can continuously be refined and kept active. Institutionalize planning, rather than having written a plan, as essential to NMU culture.

5. Select up to three main topics that will be addressed by the initiative.

- ☐ Advising
- ☐ Assessment
- ☐ Civic Engagement
- ☐ Curriculum
- ☐ Diversity
- ☐ Engagement
- ☐ Faculty Development
- ☐ First-Year Programs
- ☐ General Education
- ☐ Leadership
- ☐ Learning Environment
- ☐ Online Learning
- ☐ Persistence and Completion
- ☐ Professional Development

☐ Program Development	☒ Strategic Planning	☐ Underserved Populations
☐ Program Evaluation	☐ Student Learning	☐ Workforce
☐ Quality Improvement	☐ Student Success	☐ Other:
☐ Retention	☐ Teaching/Pedagogy	

6. Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments and determine what has been accomplished.

The recently-approved *2022 Interim Strategic Plan* is designed to guide NMU through approximately the end of academic year 2022-23 or into the following academic year. We do not intend to operate without a plan when the interim plan expires, so success in the QI project will be indicated by the approval of a stable and effective process for active planning on campus. The major milestone we will report on will be the approval of a planning process. Our Board of Trustees and President will approve planning plans – a systemic process for both 1., writing and launching the long-term strategic plan that will take over with the conclusion of the current interim plan, and 2., continuously assessing progress and adjusting tactics throughout the lifespan of the plan.

A major focus of the *2022 Interim Strategic Plan* is to state goals that are attainable and measurable, and to clearly state for each what success looks like. Similarly, this commitment to stating clear, actionable, and measurable goals – and to explicitly state the criteria for success – will be an essential part of this QI. Because the objective of this work is to develop a planning process, how that will look is currently unclear (clarifying that is the project). What we can state firmly, though, is that a successful outcome will be a planning process that is approved by the President, approved by the Board of Trustees, implemented, and assessed and adjusted based on early experience. The successful planning process will be on that is designed to:

- Produce a strategic plan that includes essential elements (e.g., goal strategies, specific oversight, pre-defined metrics, clear timelines),
- Engage campus constituents (e.g., students, faculty, staff),
- Engage a broad range of additional constituents (e.g., alumni, employers, community members), and
- Continue to refine and revise the strategic plan throughout its implementation lifespan.

Our *2022 Interim Strategic Plan* does not have a firm closing date, but it was explicitly written to be a short-term guiding document. This gives us both urgency and flexibility. We are committed to immediately devoting institutional attention to developing an NMU planning process. We have engaged the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) to facilitate our culture-change work. President Schuiling, working with the Board of Trustees, has directed the Institutional Effectiveness office and others on campus to prioritize strategic planning to both attract a strong field of candidates for our presidential search, and also to set up the new president for enough time to transition into office and lead development of our next-generation plan.

The timeline of the planning process development work can be adjusted to respond to the outcomes of our open presidential search and other factors, but has commenced with preliminary work already begun while we have been working on the recently-approved interim plan. The project will need to be completed either during the 2022-23 academic year or shortly after.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

7. Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.

With the process of developing the *2022 Interim Strategic Plan* having already begun the work of shifting institutional culture to one of active constituent engagement with planning, we have begun to see interest among stakeholders in getting involved in planning and seeing strategic planning as meaningful.

The Board of Trustees is strongly committed to making planning a high priority and has signaled ongoing focused interest in both short- and long-term planning.

President Schuiling has directed senior leadership to prioritize planning. She has made planning updates part of her key communication with Trustees and updates are part of every Board of Trustees meeting. She participated in the engagement sessions that were part of the development of the interim plan. She regularly devotes focused attention to strategic planning in meetings with leadership. Parallel to the work already begun on developing and fleshing out the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan and processes for next generation planning (the focus of the QI), the NMU President has tasked the Associate Provost and the Assistant Provost/Director of Institutional Effectiveness with developing revised high-level decision-making structures. Older structures have been revised with new President's Leadership Council established with, in part, the charge of oversight, monitoring, and strategic advising of the President based on the strategic plan. The President has stated clearly in Leadership meetings that planning is the main focus of that body's work.

Faculty willingness to devote time to the process is currently inconsistent. Many have stepped up as co-chairs of the focus areas of the interim plan, participants in the listening sessions created to obtain community input in the interim plan, and joining interim plan focus area steering committees (focus area steering committees have a faculty co-chair and also membership from additional faculty). Others have indicated that recent demands on their time and energy have them feeling unable or unwilling to add planning work to their plates. An anticipated challenge of the QI will be to increase participation in the planning process, particularly by faculty. This will be attempted through constantly working to connect the planning process to meaningful institutional work. By making clear that strategic planning is part of important institutional operations, faculty and other constituents will be able to see value in spending their limited time engaged in the work. Faculty members are currently participating in the work (co-chairing and serving as members of focus area steering committees) and, because faculty perception of the process as one they co-own is essential to success, that participation will be built on to engender broader faculty engagement.

Building participation by other stakeholders such as students, staff, alumni, employers, and community members will be a high priority in both developing the NMU planning process and in implementing the changes to campus planning activities.

8. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

The Board of Trustees will approve the planning process. They will also approve each version or generation of the NMU strategic plan.

The Office of the President is responsible for leadership of staff efforts to propose a planning process and implement campus involvement in planning activities.

The Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs is responsible for building active participation by faculty and other academic professionals.

The Institutional Effectiveness office leads the development of planning processes as collaborative work across and outside campus. IE conducts activities that engage a wide range of constituents to facilitate integrated strategic planning. IE supports the President and the Provost/VPAA by facilitating steering committee work that most actively engages faculty, administration, and staff in the work developing action plans to implement the *2022 Interim Strategic Plan*; the expectation is this type of facilitation/coordination will continue through the QI work developing long-term planning processes.

Faculty and other campus unions, Alumni Relations, the student government, and other representative groups will be expected to facilitate their constituents' engagement with the work and/or provide University leadership feedback on how their constituents are responding to demands on their time and attention.

9. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.

Institutional Effectiveness has been directed to lead planning. The University has invested in planning by creating a new position, Planning Coordinator, in the IE office.

Planning work is being facilitated by the Society for College and University Planners (SCUP), who have already been to campus to assist interim strategic planning. Three IE staff members attended the 2022 SCUP Annual Conference and completed the SCUP "Design" Planning Institute in July 2022.

Marketing and Communications is engaged with developing print and online materials that support engagement in planning and communicate outcomes.

The Office of the President and senior leadership have been actively involved in revamping NMU's planning processes through the development of the *2022 Interim Strategic Plan* and are committed to continued active engagement in both developing long-term planning processes and a shifted campus culture where planning is valued. They are committed to carrying out new planning processes when such are in place to develop the institution's next-generation plan. The President has approved creation of a new staff position in the IE office devoted primarily to strategic planning.

Faculty members and staff, primarily senior administration, co-chair steering committees guiding the work of the five Focus Areas of the *2022 Interim Strategic Plan* and are committed to continue active planning engagement.

Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

(The institution may include a brief implementation or action plan.)

10. Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.

Pre-QI Work, development of the current interim strategic plan

- December 2021-February 2022 Institutional Effectiveness distilled from existing planning materials essential focus and strategies elements to bring into the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan.
- February 2022 staff and faculty co-chairs for interim plan focus areas were identified and began work refining strategies.
- March 2022 campus engagement sessions provided faculty, students, and staff the opportunity to voice their ideas about the draft interim plan.

- April 2022 Board of Trustees approved the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan. This marks completion of what we call Phase I of Interim Planning.
- Spring 2022 while rapidly working to get an interim plan into place, IE and others began documenting lessons learned in successful community engagement during interim planning.
- Spring 2022 into Summer 2022 Focus Area steering committees, with faculty and staff co-chairs and IE facilitation, began developing action plans for each of the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan focus areas.

QI Work, development of a stable, long-term planning process

- Summer 2022 into Fall 2022, deepening development of 2022 Interim Strategic Plan – fleshing out the descriptions of work involved under each of the five plan focus areas by writing detailed action plans with tactics described, specific metrics identified, and other fine-grain details needed to act on the goals established in the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan. (This marks the beginning of what we call Phase II of Interim Planning.)
- August 1, 2022 closing of the application for University President.
- Fall 2022, simultaneous continuous improvement activities in implementation of 2022 Interim Strategic Plan and initiation of strategic planning process development work.
- Fall 2022, direct candidates for the presidency to the 2022 Interim Strategic Plan and the in-progress QI work to develop a planning process.
- AY 2022-23, work to collaboratively build strategic planning processes.
- Anticipated AY 2022-23, inauguration of new NMU president. Adjustments to planning development and strategic planning work will be made under the new president's leadership.
- AY 2023-24 or when possible after arrival of new president, completion of planning process development and approval of process. Following approval of planning process, initiation of collaborative strategic planning work to develop NMU's next strategic plan.

Post-QI Work, development of NMU's next-generation strategic plan

- Some flexibility in dates, but in academic year 2023-24 or soon thereafter approve next-generation strategic plan, which will have been developed using the process that will be built during the QI.
- Throughout the lifespan of the strategic plan, implement the community engagement processes developed through the QI project.
- Throughout the lifespan of the strategic plan, monitor key performance indicators, monitor the postsecondary education environment, and adjust the plan as needed.

Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

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