



COMMON THEMES AND BEST PRACTICES: *Results from the 2016-2018 AIM Program Site Visits*

INTEGRATIVE GOVERNANCE

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An aligned academic health center must have a high-functioning, integrated governance structure with a defined, transparent planning and decision-making process

SELECTED SITE VISIT OBSERVATIONS:

“The academic health center would benefit from a robust governance structure that could make important and binding decisions in respect to the academic health center’s policies and operations...there is a need for an overarching authority to drive and steer strategic progress.”

“The institution would benefit from integration of strategic plans and joint planning across the colleges.”

“Develop a true joint strategic planning process in addition to the committees already in place.”

Key Points for Alignment and Integrative Strategies

- Clarify that the “CEO” has the responsibility and authority to create both the institutional prioritization for alignment and its execution. Leadership ‘above’ the CEO confers expectations and authority
 - > CEO creates the alignment tone, expectations, assessment measures, and accountability for the academic health center
 - > CEO, and other leaders, reward alignment progress
- Establish an internal administrative infrastructure (e.g., joint hirings, reduced duplicative staffing)
 - > Formalize transparent structures and processes
 - > Incorporate internal governance and planning structures
- Build joint strategic planning process with authority to drive strategic process toward overarching mission and goals
 - > Provide meaningful roles and responsibilities for leaders representing all tiers
 - > Establish joint strategic planning expertise and infrastructure (e.g., regularly scheduled meetings with clear agendas and goals that integrate sectorial strategic plans)
 - > Operationalize joint branding
 - > To bridge a divide, hold facilitated meetings between section leaders to create one- to five-year joint strategic plan to define and achieve shared mission goals
 - > Focus on strong coordination between central and federated planning
- Institute transparent decision-making process that includes clear accountability (e.g., apply metrics—clear, quantitative measures—to both inform and support strategic decision-making)

Discussion Focus

Improving institutional alignment requires an alignment of leadership around key goals.

A typical university's decentralized decision-making is not intrinsically attuned to alignment principles. The leadership of the university may not understand the critical importance of mission alignment within an academic health center. Ideally, the CEO of the academic health center obtains clear support for the alignment agenda from her/his university superiors. In turn, the CEO makes clear that alignment will be an academic health center priority and the resources will follow. Deans and other leaders may not believe that mission alignment is in their immediate best interest, so clarity of purpose and patience are required. It may be helpful to clarify that mission alignment is not the only strategic priority of the academic health center. An institutional Communication Officer can be very helpful in messaging.

Frequent progress reports from academic health center leaders, led by the CEO and with an appropriate mix of patience and impatience, communicate the prioritization of institutional and mission alignment.

Strategic planning is not necessarily a part of the governance leadership skill set. Several strategies can increase the likelihood of success: make planning (reasonably) inclusive; hire a consultant/facilitator at least once; develop internal planning expertise and offer that expertise to all units; marry the strategic plans of the academic and clinical units with the overall academic health center strategic plan; appoint a "keeper" for each initiative who reports progress to the group; make planning results widely known and request feedback on a "final" plan; be willing to scratch some parts of a plan rather than let them languish; and have fun with planning as a group—make it a socializing event.

Developing Exemplars

It is helpful for academic health center leadership to develop mission alignment exemplars—only a few in the beginning—to receive priority and perhaps set aside resources. This can be done on a competitive basis, and may form the foundation for a request to a potential donor. Alignment exemplars could include: enhancing partnerships between Schools

and hospital; a specific clinical focus that unites clinical and research strengths of the academic health center; educational enhancements (e.g., simulation laboratories) used by academic and clinical units; and judicious consolidation of unique skilled leadership positions, for example finance, which might provide a higher level of expertise and an opportunity at integration. Leaders from these exemplars then may become the next group of alignment cheerleaders.

The concept of "mission alignment" seems like a good idea to almost everyone. Therefore, it may be the best entrée for institutions that are experiencing "communication problems". We found this to be so based on AIM site visits. At one institution, when the entrée was "mission alignment for an academic health center," we found a near complete lack of communication, mission and unit alignment only by chance, and an organizational structure that was barely functional. This visit allowed consultants to comment on the dysfunctional organizational structure, the academic health center leadership's pervasive misunderstanding about funds flow and finance, an unintentional lack of transparency, and faculty malaise born of disconnected leadership. This was hard news, but "alignment" became a potentially unifying banner.

Including Hospitals in Mission Alignment

Academic health centers that do not own their own hospitals have separate alignment challenges. Often times, the academic health center governance behaves as if 'the hospital' is a disconnected funder, and the hospital perceives the academic mission as an optional drain on resources. High priority must be given to aligning the mission of the affiliated healthcare system with that of the academic institution. This big challenge should involve a sincere attempt to understand the priorities and the goals of the hospital system. In turn, academic health center leadership must strive to communicate what's most important on "the academic side". Finding "win - win" opportunities requires determined and patient learning, understanding, negotiation, and a continual focus on the concept and benefit of better alignment.