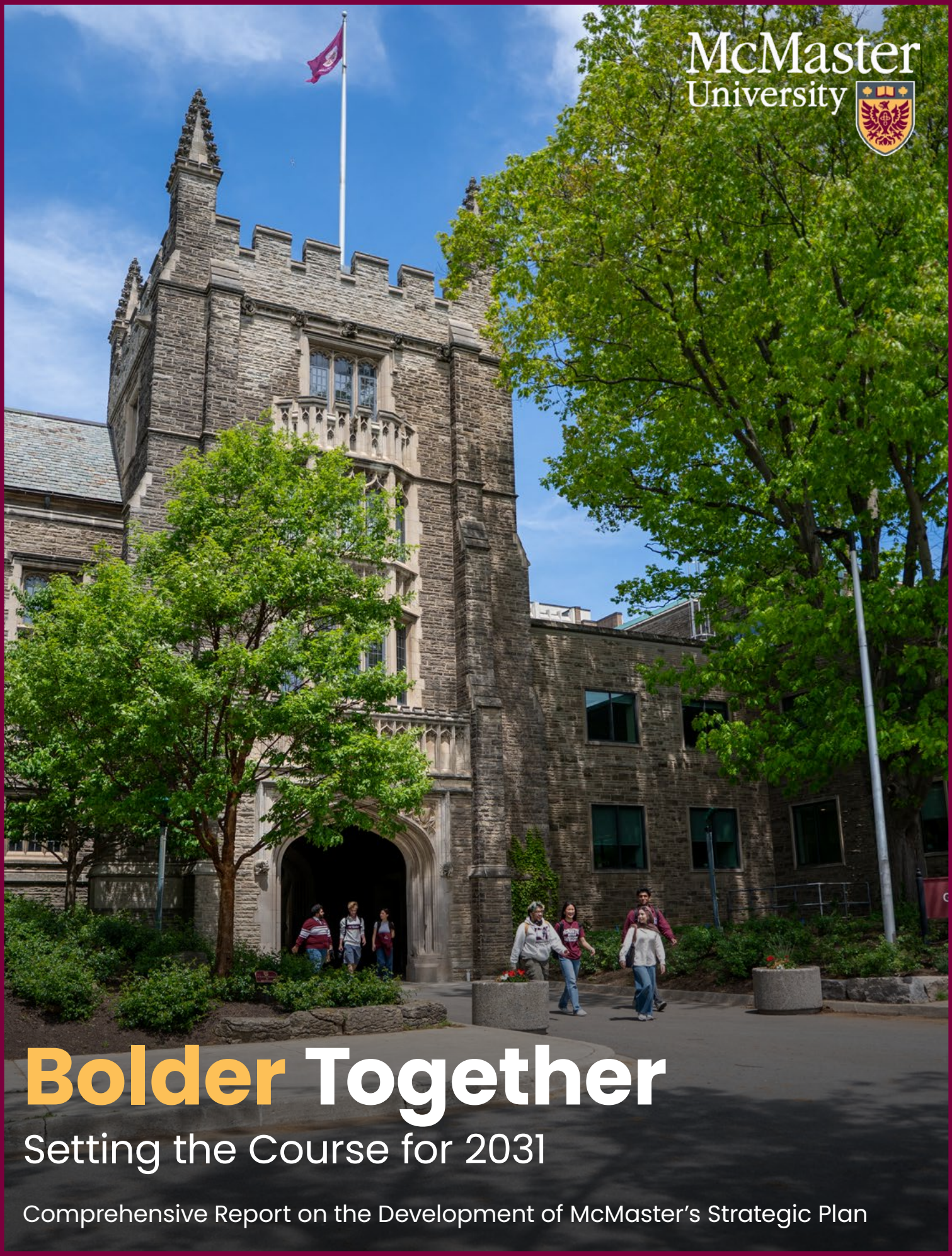

Bolder Together

Setting the Course for 2031

Comprehensive Report on the Development of McMaster's Strategic Plan

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Land Acknowledgement

McMaster University is sited on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee Nations and within the lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum agreement. We recognize the enduring presence of Indigenous Peoples and commit to respectful partnership and stewardship.

The current McMaster Land Acknowledgement is being used in this document while additional reflection and consultation is underway to provide an updated acknowledgement.

Executive Summary

Bolder Together is McMaster University's strategic plan for 2026 to 2031 and will guide the university through the centennial anniversary of McMaster's move to Hamilton in 2030.

It is an action plan, and success will be defined by impact. While discovery remains central to our mission, Bolder Together calls on our communities to maximize the reach and application of new knowledge through targeted excellence and clear differentiation. This includes both the essential role of foundational research in advancing understanding and applied research to create impact.

The plan and the priorities within it reflect the diverse perspectives, experiences, dreams and aspirations of our communities. It builds on McMaster's strengths in research, teaching, innovation and community connections while positioning the university to respond to rapid social, technological, economic and environmental change.

This comprehensive report outlines how the university arrived at the institutional priorities and actions reflected in the plan. It spans the period from November 2025, when the strategic planning work started, to the end of June 2026, when the Strategic Planning Team concluded its work. The process was broad, inclusive and evidence-informed, drawing on more than 7,000 contributions from students, faculty, staff, alumni, community partners, Indigenous peoples, health care organizations, industry and government. Engagement took place through surveys, consultations, workshops, focus groups, pop-ups, regional and international alumni events and written submissions.

Several consistent themes emerged throughout the process: the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, learner-centred education, research impact and commercialization, Indigenous reconciliation, accessibility and inclusion, operational sustainability and stronger community partnerships. Participants also emphasized the need for McMaster to focus its efforts in areas where we lead with distinction and deliver meaningful societal impact.

The Jan. 14, 2026 Setting the Course drop-in session at Convocation Hall was just one of many opportunities for the McMaster community to share their thoughts about the university's future.

These insights shaped the plan's four institutional priorities:

- Amplifying Our Impact
- Research That Transforms Lives
- Learner-Centred Education
- Inclusive Communities Where All Can Flourish

The plan is supported by foundational commitments to Indigenous reconciliation, operational excellence, environmental stewardship and bold thinking.

This report also outlines next steps for the implementation and accountability framework that will guide progress through 2031, including aligned Faculty and unit planning, measurable outcomes and ongoing community engagement. Together, the process and resulting plan position McMaster to enter its next century in Hamilton with clarity, ambition and a renewed commitment to translating the research and learning that takes place at our university into action that improves health, strengthens society and prepares the next generation of leaders and citizens.

7,000+
perspectives

100+
consultations

7+
months

The Strategic Planning Process

Phase 1: Developing the Process

The development of Bolder Together began in Fall 2025 with the ambitious goal of creating a strategic plan that was shaped by the McMaster community over seven months. The compressed timeline was mandated by McMaster's Board of Governors as the final plan had to be submitted by June 2, 2026 for approval at the June 11 Board meeting.

On Nov. 24, 2025, President Susan Tighe formally launched the process through a message to all students, faculty and staff introducing Setting the Course. From the outset, the process was designed to be transparent, inclusive and evidence-informed, with a strong emphasis on meaningful engagement and shared ownership.

Implementation

November 2025
Phase 1: Planning

January 2026
Launch

February – March 2026
Phase 2: Consultation

April 2026
Phase 3: Data Analysis

May 2026
Phase 4: Drafting of the Strategic Plan

June 2026
Board Approval

Timeline with the milestones of the strategic planning process.

Structure and Leadership

Two groups were established to guide the work.

The Strategic Oversight Committee (SOC) chaired by the President, brought together representatives from all six Faculties, as well as students, postdoctoral fellows, staff, members of the Senate and Board of Governors who were also alumni. This committee provided broad direction and accountability throughout the process. See Appendix I: SOC Terms of Reference for more information.

The Strategic Planning Team (SPT) was responsible for coordinating consultations, gathering input and managing the day-to-day work of drafting the plan. Members were selected for their varied expertise in institutional strategy, academic leadership, research, communications, governance, project management, community engagement and operational planning. Team members also brought an Indigenous and equity lens to the work. See Appendix II: SPT Terms of Reference for more information.

The SPT was supported by an advisory group comprising individuals with expertise in Indigenous matters, strategy and governance, and alumni engagement and advancement. Team members also received extensive support from two university units, Marketing and Institutional Research and Analysis (IRA). The full list of contributors is provided in Appendix III: Supporting Units of the Strategic Planning Process.

Top photo (adjacent page): Strategic Oversight Committee members. Back row, from left, are Brent Davis, Sara Salimi, Katherine Cuff, Bhagwati Gupta, Jennifer Heisz, Monique Beech and Kusum Bhatta. Front row, from left, are Darran Fernandez, Susan McCracken, Jen Power, Susan Tighe, Nancy McKenzie, Nicole Wagner and Bonnie Freeman. Not pictured: Mike Ayers, Violetta Igneski, Beverly Jacobs, Natalia Lishchyna, Piper Plavins, Jonathan Sherbino, Keena Trowell and Margaret Zanel.

Bottom photo (adjacent page): Strategic Planning Team members. Back row, from left, are Karen Krueger, Kerry O'Brien, Fernando Carneiro, Joanne Gittens and Laura Couchie. Front row, from left, are Arlene Dosen, Nancy McKenzie, Susan McCracken, Amanda Baldwin, Cheryl Louzado and Karen Knott.

Foundational Work

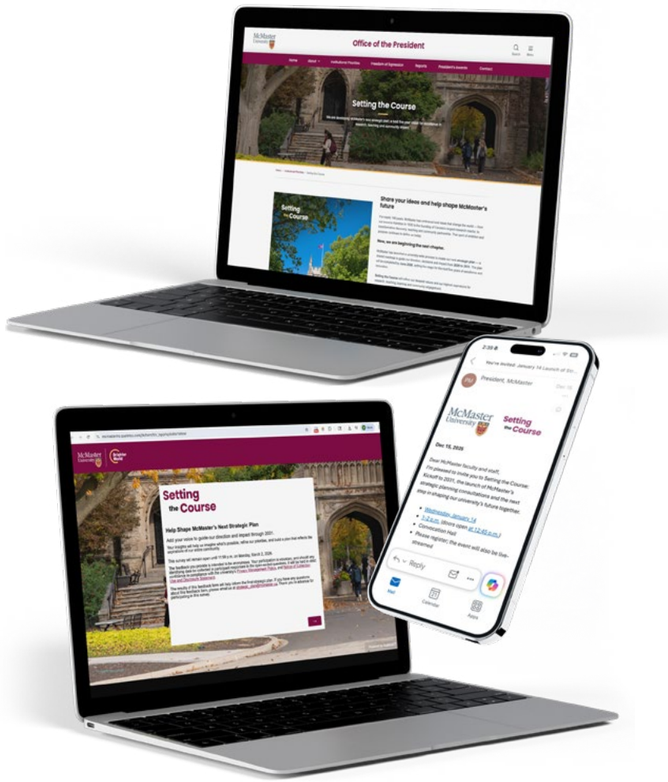
Early in the process, the SPT focused on creating the structures and tools needed to support broad participation. This included developing the Setting the Course identity, brand and website with support from McMaster's marketing team, and designing communications and engagement strategies. The Setting the Course brand provided a clear and cohesive identity that helped unify communications and increase recognition across channels.

A detailed marketing and communications process was designed to engage students, faculty, staff, alumni, partners and friends of the university, ensuring their perspectives helped shape the plan. Recognizing that people prefer to engage in different ways, a variety of tactics supported both direct and indirect participation, creating multiple entry points for meaningful and inclusive involvement.

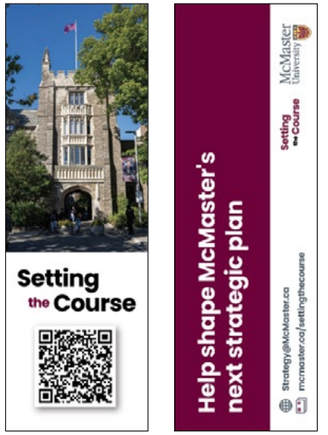
A wide range of channels and engagement opportunities were used to bring these voices forward, including:

- The dedicated website: McMaster.ca/SettingTheCourse
- Online survey
- McMaster News website
  - Setting the Course: Calling on the McMaster community to help shape our next strategic plan | November 24, 2025
  - Setting the Course: McMaster to launch strategic planning consultations at event on January 14 | December 15, 2025
  - Setting the Course: Join livestream and drop-in session as strategic planning consultations begin | January 9, 2026
  - Setting the Course: McMaster community weighs in on planning process | January 20, 2026
  - Faculty and Staff Consultations: March 30 to April 1 - Office of the President
- Avenue to Learn (A2L)
- Email campaigns
- Social media
- Printed materials (bookmarks, posters and stickers)
- Digital screens around campus

An accompanying analytic plan was developed by McMaster's Institutional Research and Analysis to synthesize the themes and insights that would emerge from the data.



Promotional materials helped raise awareness of the strategic planning process. Above, stickers encouraged members of the McMaster community to share ideas and perspectives.



Digital and social media engagement provided additional opportunities for members of the McMaster community to participate in the strategic planning process.

Phase 2: Engaging the Community

The launch of the development of the plan took place on January 14, 2026. It was a unifying event, serving to bring together the university community to share ideas, find common ground and dream big.

This second stage in the strategic planning process was shaped by a comprehensive and intentional engagement approach announced at the event that reached well beyond campus. It brought together voices from across McMaster alongside research partners, the local community, industry partners, employers and graduates.

Over the next three months, the SPT organized more than 100 in-person and virtual engagement opportunities, each thoughtfully designed to reflect the needs and preferences of different audiences. These engagements were delivered through a variety of formats including interactive focus group sessions, drop-in hours and pop-up events.

Focus groups (30–60 minute virtual or in-person sessions) were a key engagement method within the broader consultation process, providing structured opportunities for in-depth dialogue with members of the McMaster community. These sessions enabled participants to explore ideas in greater detail, allowing facilitators to probe emerging themes, clarify perspectives, and capture nuanced feedback that complemented broader survey and open consultation data. They were designed to be flexible and accessible, supporting participation from students, faculty, staff, alumni and external partners.

Together with other engagement activities, the focus groups formed part of a deliberate effort to reflect the full diversity of McMaster's internal and external communities. See Appendix IV for the list of internal and external focus groups.

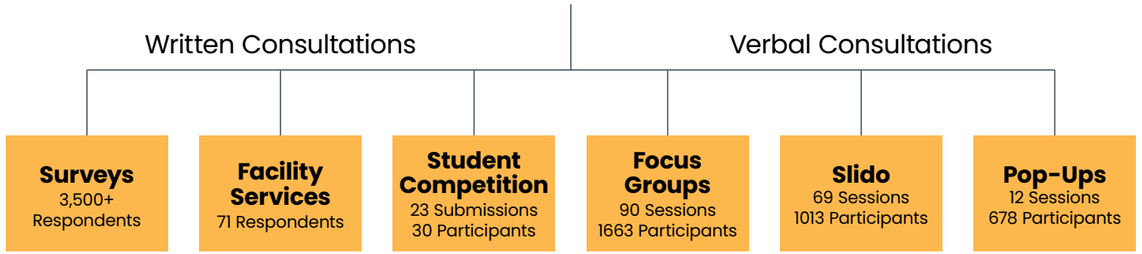
Senior leadership played an active role in reinforcing the importance of this engagement. President Tighe along with Vice-President Research, Gianni Parise, hosted consultations with Directors of Research Institutes and Centres, Canada Research Chairs and Endowed Research Chairs. President Tighe also hosted an Indigenous consultation with representatives from the Indigenous Education Council, Joint Indigenous-Administrative Consultation Group, Indigenous Studies Department, Indigenous Student Services and the Indigenous Health Learning Lodge.

The President also participated directly in key engagement moments, including attending the student competition luncheon, underscoring the value placed on student voice and creativity in shaping the plan, and at previously scheduled alumni events and reunions held across multiple countries, extending the reach of the consultation process globally.

Panel discussion at Setting the Course: Kickoff to 2031, the launch event marking the start of McMaster's strategic planning consultations.

Phase 3: Analyzing and Thematic Summary of the Information

7,000+ Perspectives from our community



Data collection methods used during the community consultations.

With the end of the community consultation phase on April 2, analysis of the information was overseen by McMaster's Institutional Research and Analysis.

To make sense of such a large volume of feedback, different text-analysis methods were used to ensure depth and reliability of the results (the manuscript detailing this process will be submitted for publication and will be made publicly available).

The analysis combined advanced computational tools with human (expert) review to help organize and compare responses across all consultation channels. Themes were cross-checked using different methods to ensure the findings were reliable and reflected the perspectives shared across the McMaster community.

Once the major themes were identified, they were consolidated into broader institutional priorities. These priorities were then reviewed in the context of McMaster's existing strengths, future opportunities and the changing landscape facing higher education.

The process highlighted both long-standing priorities, such as student experience, research excellence and community engagement, and emerging areas of focus, including commercialization and impact, artificial intelligence, sustainability and financial resilience.

The analysis ensured that the strategic plan's institutional priorities are evidence-based, representative and reflective of what the McMaster community said is important to them.

Daniel Wilding, Information and Data Analyst with McMaster's Institutional Research and Analysis, presents at a Strategic Oversight Committee meeting.

Phase 4: Drafting of the Plan

Following IRA's analysis and synthesis of community input, a senior leadership strategic planning workshop including members from the President and Vice-Presidents (PVP) group, Provost Council and Admin Strats (Directors and Associate Vice-Presidents under the Vice-President Operations and Finance) was held on April 14, 2026 to review the key themes from the engagement activities and to identify priority areas of focus. A separate workshop with members of the Strategic Oversight Committee was also held on April 14 for the same purpose. The SPT used insights and feedback from the workshops to draft an initial plan.

In May, the draft plan was presented to PVP, Provost Council, and the Board of Governors' Executive & Governance Committee. It was also reviewed by selected Admin Strats members and revised accordingly. The penultimate draft plan was then presented to the SOC for a final revision.

The plan needed to be ambitious, yet grounded, ensuring actions could be tracked and measured. The result of this phase was a cohesive strategic plan that reflected both the collective voice of the McMaster community and the key differentiators required to deliver meaningful impact over the next five years.

President Susan Tighe chairs a meeting of the Strategic Oversight Committee.

Engagement Activities

The engagement process that led to the perspectives, thoughts, opinions and findings used to draft Bolder Together was designed with the understanding that different individuals prefer to engage in different ways, ensuring inclusivity in participation. It aimed to incorporate insights from a broad range of contributors, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, partners, and friends of the university, into the development process. To support this, both direct and indirect opportunities for engagement were provided, allowing participants to contribute in ways that best suited their preferences.

Surveys: Capturing Community Insight at Scale

Surveys were a central component of the engagement process, providing accessible and structured ways for participants to share feedback. The questions asked in the surveys are provided in Appendix V: Survey Questions.

The main Setting the Course survey was launched on November 24, 2025 and remained open until April 2, 2026. Additional surveys were introduced in phases, including an alumni survey in February and surveys for employers, community members, industry, government and academic partners in March.

Participation was encouraged through coordinated promotion across email, Avenue to Learn (A2L), posters, in-person events, as well as custom bookmarks and sticker boxes placed in high-traffic areas. The sticker boxes were designed to resemble the familiar poppy box with a QR code to promote completing the strategic planning survey.

McMaster's government relations team also made direct phone calls to government offices to encourage participation in the survey and ensure government perspectives were reflected in the strategic planning process.

To further encourage participation and recognize the time contributed by respondents, the engagement process also included incentives for survey completion. Incentives included weekly McMaster swag draws for students and a Dyson vacuum draw for alumni respondents.

Across all survey versions, 3,545 completed responses were received:

- **Main Setting the Course Survey: 2,130**
- **Alumni Survey: 1,462**
- **Employer Survey: 76**
- **Community Survey: 13**
- **Industry Survey: 9**
- **Government Partners Survey: 3**

In addition to collecting feedback, the surveys also helped participants better understand the role of a strategic plan and how community input would shape the McMaster's future.

Noor, a third-year Science student, won the first weekly McMaster SWAG draw, which was introduced to encourage students to complete the survey.

On-Campus Engagement and Consultation Activities

A broad range of on-campus engagement opportunities supported meaningful participation in the strategic planning process and created multiple ways for students, faculty and staff to contribute. Where possible, Strategic Planning Team members embedded opportunities for engagement into existing gatherings and events such as Faculty Council meetings, the TMG Forum, the Summer Job Fair, and several off-main campus locations, ensuring students, faculty and staff could contribute in familiar and trusted settings.

Mission, Vision, Values Senior Leadership Session (November 18, 2025)

Convened by President Tighe, this session formally launched the strategic planning process, bringing together 15 members of the President and Vice-Presidents team as well as the Faculty Deans. The discussion led to senior leadership reflecting on McMaster's current and future mission, vision and values statements and how the extensive consultation process would guide the effort, ensuring it was a plan built by and for the community.

McMaster's president, vice-presidents and deans met to discuss the university's vision, mission and values. The session was facilitated by Mark John Stewart, Managing Director, Wentworth Strategy Group; Industry Professor with the Master of Communications Management (MCM) program and DeGroote School of Business Executive Education and advisor to the Strategic Planning Team.

Front, from left: Pamela Swett, Katherine Cuff, Saher Fazilat, Gianni Parise, Bruce Newbold, Susan Tighe, Maureen MacDonald, Khaled Hassanein, and Mark John Stewart. Stairs, from left: Lili Litwin, Paul O'Byrne, David Estok, Alex Lawson, Clare Mitchell and Dina Brooks.

Strategic Foresight Retreat on Generative AI and Institutional Change (December 3, 2025)

The Strategic Foresight Retreat brought together more than 45 senior university leaders from PVP, Provost Council and Admin Strats to help the plan account for one major disruptor: Artificial Intelligence (AI). While traditional strategic planning looks at where we want to go, the futures thinking session aimed to anticipate the range of futures the McMaster community may have to be ready for in the context of AI.

Shane Saunderson, assistant professor and the Director of the Research on Artificial Persons Lab, speaks about envisioning how AI will impact the higher education sector in the coming years.

Strategic Plan Launch Kickoff Event (January 14, 2026)

Setting the Course: Kickoff to 2031 marked the formal launch of the community consultations phase of the strategic planning cycle. While registration for the main launch event in the Concert Hall at L.R. Wilson Hall reached capacity soon after it was announced, a livestream and an open drop-in session following the event provided additional ways for the McMaster community to participate.

More than 1,000 community members participated in person and online with the livestream reaching more than 700 live views and over four hundred more views afterward. Through live polling, a community vision panel and interactive opportunities to share ideas, participants helped surface early insights and build a shared sense of ownership of the plan.

Just as important, the event reinforced a transparent and accessible approach to engagement. Senior university leaders, including the president, provost, vice-president, Research, and vice-president (Operations and Finance) were present to hear first-hand the ambitions and goals of McMaster community members.

This moment marked a transition from launch to sustained dialogue, inviting faculty, staff, students, alumni, partners and friends of the university to provide feedback to help shape the plan.

The Management Group (TMG) Forum (January 22, 2026)

The Strategic Planning Team presented at the annual TMG forum in January to inform more than 210 participants at the Forum about the strategic planning process. Members presented an overview of the planning process and timeline, reinforced TMG's role as strategic partners and built momentum for survey participation as a leadership responsibility.

Arlene Dosen, Assistant Dean and Executive Director of Student Success, and a member of the Strategic Planning Team presents at the TMG Forum on Jan. 22, 2026.

Student-Focused Pop-Up Events (February 3-6; March 3, 2026)

The Strategic Planning Team held 11 pop-up events across main campus and at several off-campus sites. On-campus locations included:

- Ewart Angus Centre
- David Braley Athletic Centre
- The HUB
- L.R. Wilson Hall
- Indigenous Student Services
- Mills Library
- McMaster University Student Centre

Off-campus locations included:

- 10 Bay Graduate Student Residence
- David Braley Health Sciences Centre
- McMaster Innovation Park
- McMaster Automotive Resource Centre
- Ron Joyce Centre in Burlington
- Liuna Station in Hamilton

Though the focus for these pop-ups was to engage students in the places where they live, work and study, being in these locations also allowed SPT members to engage with faculty and staff. During the pop-ups participants responded to three questions:

- When you think of McMaster, what is one word that comes to mind?
- What sets McMaster apart?
- What is the most important priority for the next strategic plan?

Through these pop ups, the SPT engaged 638 McMaster community members, 83 per cent of whom were students.

Cheryl Louzado, member of the Strategic Planning Team, speaks to a student during a pop up event at the Mills Library.

Student Competition (February 2 - March 2, 2026)

Students were invited to participate in a student strategic plan competition through email, digital communications and the Student Success Centre's communication channels. Participants provided vision, mission and values statements along with three to five strategic priorities, with aligned objectives and metrics. Participants had one month to complete the electronic submission form by the March 2, 2026 deadline. Submissions went through eligibility review, rubric scoring and panel deliberation before winners were selected. The rubric criteria included the quality of the strategy, the degree of creativity and innovation, the extent of feasibility of implementation as well as the quality of the presentation of information. Scores ranged from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent). Four Strategic Planning Team members conducted the scoring.

A total of 30 participants engaged in the competition across 23 submissions. Sixteen were undergraduate and seven were graduate student submissions. Participants were from programs within Business, Divinity, Engineering, Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences.

Three students and one team of two were recognized at a celebration lunch. Three of the submissions were from graduate students and one was from a Year 3 undergraduate student.

McMaster students joined members of the Strategic Planning Team, the Vice-President, Research, Gianni Parise, and President Susan Tighe, centre, at the Student Competition Celebration Lunch on March 26, 2026.

Professor Susan McCracken, SPT Co-Chair, leads a community consultation attended by about 100 Facilities staff members.

Focus Group Sessions (January - April 2026)

Strategic Planning Team (SPT) members and co-chairs facilitated 103 consultation sessions engaging 1,663 faculty, staff, students, alumni, retirees, and other members of the McMaster community across campus and beyond. SPT members either participated in already existing meetings or attended scheduled sessions that were part of a series of back-to-back meeting days.

The Strategic Planning Team created numerous opportunities for engaging with faculty, staff and students across McMaster locations in Burlington, Niagara, Waterloo and Hamilton, and our wider community beyond our main campus' borders. Current and past presidents and chancellors, retirees, and alumni, members of our community who have dedicated time, resources and energy to our institution for decades, also took part in consultations.With the exception of eight consultations (Associate Vice President, Research; Faculty Deans; International Strategy Advisory Group; Associate Deans and Assistant Deans Undergraduate; Faculty and Unit/Department EDI leads; Associate Deans Graduate; Canada Research Chairs, Directors of Research Institutes and Centres, and SSHRC Grant Holders; and AI Advisory Group) that used tailored questions, all other consultations used a common set of questions.

- What values would best serve as McMaster's core principles as we look to our future?
- What is the mission/ purpose of McMaster?
- What sets McMaster apart?
- Looking to the future - What should be McMaster's Key Priorities over the next five years?
- When you think of McMaster what is the first word that you think of?

Slido, an interactive audience engagement platform, was used to facilitate real-time participation and gather live feedback through enabling participants to contribute responses anonymously. The use of Slido helped to foster dynamic and inclusive discussions by giving all participants a way to engage, share opinions and contribute to the discussion.

Together with other engagement activities, the focus groups formed part of a deliberate effort to reflect the full diversity of McMaster's internal and external communities.

Open Faculty and Staff Consultations (March 25-26, 31 and April 1, 2026)

The Strategic Planning team also hosted both virtual and in-person open consultation sessions for faculty and staff. Sessions included three faculty, two TMG and two Unifor consultation sessions on various days and times to allow individuals to join at their convenience. In total, 126 faculty and staff members participated.

Strategic Plan Office Hours (March 30 and April 2, 2026)

One of the last opportunities the Strategic Planning Team offered for McMaster community members to provide feedback were office hours. These informal drop-ins gave McMaster community members a chance to join SPT members for open discussion and the gathering of feedback. Although only one staff member participated, the two full days of office hours demonstrated the Strategic Planning Team's commitment to ensuring that various formats of engagement were included as part of the process.

Consultations Beyond the Main Campus

Consultations extended beyond the main campus to engage key external audiences and broader university communities in meaningful ways. Through targeted events and outreach activities, the Strategic Planning Team connected with alumni, employer partners, and staff across multiple regions and settings. These efforts were designed to gather diverse perspectives to inform the university's emerging strategic plan while strengthening relationships and ensuring that input reflected a wide range of experiences, expectations and priorities.

Alumni Regional Events (November 2025 - May 2026)

Between November 2025 and May 2026, the president and members from the Office of Alumni Engagement engaged alumni leaders and alumni communities through board meetings, focus groups, surveys and live polling in London, U.K., Boston, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Montreal, Hong Kong and Singapore. This input was gathered to inform the emerging strategic plan and to clarify alumni expectations around McMaster's future direction, reputation and relationship with its graduates. Attendance at alumni regional events totaled 358.

Connect to Careers Fair (March 3, 2026)

The Connect to Careers Fair hosted nearly 100 employers. A member of the SPT attended and shared about McMaster's strategic planning process and invited them to complete the survey. Following the event, a direct email was sent to a broader list of McMaster employer partners, including those who attended the Career Fair, inviting them to complete the survey.

Inspiring from Within Employee Development Conference (March 12, 2026)

The Strategic Planning Team set up a pop-up station at the Inspire from Within Employee Development Conference held at Liuna Station in downtown Hamilton, bringing the strategic planning process directly into a key staff-focused conference.

The informal setting created valuable opportunities for one-on-one conversations, which allowed more than 50 attendees to reflect on their experiences at the university and contribute ideas in a personal and accessible way.

Joanne Gittens and Fernando Carneiro, Strategic Planning Team members, at the Inspire from Within conference at Liuna Station, downtown Hamilton.

Strategic Plan Report Backs

The Strategic Planning Team conducted a series of report-back sessions and presentations to share emerging themes from the consultation process, validate early findings and gather initial feedback from key interest holders. These engagements included dedicated virtual sessions for faculty, staff and students, as well as targeted presentations to internal groups. Together, these sessions provided important opportunities to communicate progress, test alignment and build awareness of the evolving strategic direction.

Strategic Plan Faculty, Staff and Student Report Backs (May 14, 2026)

Faculty, staff and students were invited to register for their own dedicated 45-minute virtual session to learn more about the process, emerging themes and to ask questions.

In total, 207 individuals attended these sessions, including 36 faculty members, 160 staff members and 11 students.

Strategic Plan Update at Advance 5.0 Week (May 28, 2026)

Members of the SPT presented a strategic plan update to the Advancement Team during Advance 5.0 Week, highlighting key themes from the consultation process and alignment to the campaign.

Faculty of Health Sciences TMG Professional Development Retreat (June 25, 2026)

Members of the SPT were invited to speak at the FHS TMG Professional Development Retreat. The presentation provided background on the strategic planning process, lessons learned and was the first opportunity to present the Mission, Vision, Values and Priorities to a group after receiving June 11 Board approval.

From Strategy to Action: Accountability and Implementation

With the development of Bolder Together, attention will turn to the beginning of a new process to translate the institutional priorities in the plan into action.

The President will hold overall responsibility for ensuring that happens successfully. She will provide leadership to ensure priorities are advanced, progress is monitored and accountability is maintained across the university.

An implementation team will provide regular reports to senior leadership and governance bodies to support collective decision-making and foster alignment between institutional priorities and the work underway across the university. Faculties and units will develop or adapt their own plans to advance the goals in Bolder Together.

The graphic, Strategic Plan in Action, illustrates how Bolder Together will guide decision-making and implementation across the university. It connects McMaster's long-term aspirations with the priorities, actions and measures that will shape the university's work over the next five years.

At the highest level, McMaster's Vision, Mission and Values define our university's purpose, aspirations and guiding principles. These are enduring elements that provide the foundation for the strategic plan and inform decision-making across the institution.

Building on this foundation, the Institutional Priorities establish where McMaster will focus our collective efforts and investments. They provide a shared direction for Faculties and administrative units while allowing flexibility to determine the most effective approaches within their own areas.

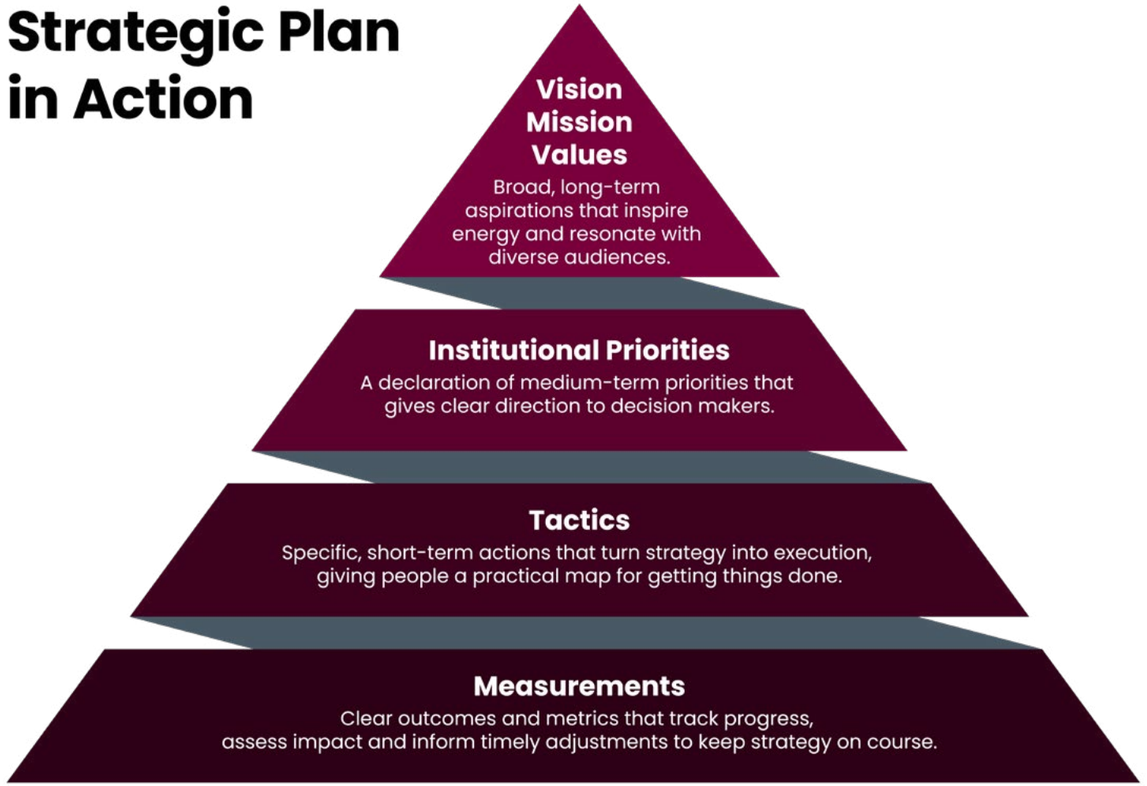
The priorities are advanced through tactics, initiatives, projects and actions developed by Faculties, administrative units and teams to support the university's strategic direction. Annual planning and budgeting processes will help align resources with these priorities and translate strategy into meaningful action.

Progress will be measured through clear outcomes and performance indicators that assess impact across the university. Regular monitoring and reporting will support accountability, inform decision-making and enable continuous improvement as implementation progresses.

Together, this framework ensures that Bolder Together is more than a statement of aspirations. It provides a clear line of sight from McMaster's Vision, Mission and Values to Institutional Priorities, implementation activities and measurable outcomes, creating a shared approach to advancing the university's strategic direction.

Students exit Chester New Hall across from Edward's Arch, reflecting McMaster's vibrant community.

Strategic Plan in Action



The graphic, Strategic Plan in Action, shows a framework that demonstrates how McMaster's strategic plan moves from aspiration to action, aligning institutional priorities with implementation tactics and measurable outcomes to support accountability and continuous improvement.

Closing Reflections

This report documents the collaborative process that led to the development of Bolder Together. More than a record of activities and consultations, it reflects our university's commitment to planning through meaningful engagement, evidence-informed decision-making and shared ownership.

Over seven months, thousands of students, faculty, staff, alumni, partners and community members helped shape a strategic direction that builds on McMaster's strengths while positioning our university to respond to the opportunities and challenges ahead. The resulting plan reflects not only what the community values most today, but also a collective ambition for the future.

As we approach the centennial of McMaster's move to Hamilton in 2030, Bolder Together provides a shared direction for the years ahead. This report marks the completion of the planning process, but the work of realizing the plan has only begun. Through continued collaboration, accountability and commitment across the university, the priorities outlined in Bolder Together will guide decisions and actions that strengthen the reach and impact of McMaster's research, teaching and learning for years to come.

Appendix

I SOC Terms of Reference

Setting the Course Strategic Oversight Committee Terms of Reference

1. Background

McMaster University is entering a pivotal chapter in its institutional journey, marked by the recent appointment of President Susan Tighe. President Tighe's leadership presents a timely and transformative opportunity to reimagine the university's strategic direction. As McMaster continues to evolve in response to global challenges, societal shifts, and academic innovation, the development of a new strategic plan will serve as a foundational roadmap to guide priorities, investments, and impact over the coming years. This process will be anchored by a Strategic Oversight Committee to ensure broad engagement, thoughtful deliberation, and alignment with McMaster's values and aspirations. Setting the Course will serve as the strategic framework underpinning planning development, priority identification, resource allocation and reporting on progress and will lead McMaster into the next phase of its journey.

2. Mandate

The Strategic Oversight Committee has key responsibilities to provide oversight to the design and implementation of the Setting the Course consultation process, communication strategy, feedback themes, document drafts, final revised strategy and approval process.

3. Membership (x22)

Membership of the Strategic Oversight Committee shall be comprised of:

1. Susan Tighe, President and Vice-Chancellor | Chair
2. Mike Ayers, Communications Engagement Program Manager, Faculty of Health Sciences
3. Monique Beech, Executive Director Strategic Communications, Communications, Marketing and Public Affairs (CMPA)
4. Kusum Bhatta, President, Graduate Student Association (GSA)
5. Katherine Cuff, Professor, Economics; Faculty of Social Sciences
6. Brent Davis, University Counsel
7. Darran Fernandez, University Registrar
8. Bonnie Freeman, Associate Professor, School of Social Work & Indigenous Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Academic Co-Chair, Indigenous Education Council.
9. Bhagwati Gupta, President, McMaster University Faculty Association (MUFA); Professor, Biology; Faculty of Science
10. Jennifer Heisz, Professor, Kinesiology; Acting Director of PACE; Faculty of Science
11. Violetta Igneski, Associate Professor, Philosophy; Faculty of Humanities
12. Beverly Jacobs, Vice-Provost Indigenous; Associate Professor, Indigenous Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences
13. Natalia Lishchyna, Board of Governors Member appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council; Town Councillor for Oakville Ward 6
14. Susan McCracken, Professor, Accounting & Financial Management Services; DeGroote School of Business
15. Nancy McKenzie, Director of Strategic Planning, Office of the President
16. Piper Plavins, President, McMaster Students Union (MSU)
17. Jen Power, Director Development; Faculty of Health Sciences
18. Sara Salimi, Postdoctoral Fellow; Faculty of Engineering
19. Jonathan Sherbino, Professor, Medicine; Assistant Dean, Medical Education Research, Innovation and Theory (MERIT); Faculty of Health Sciences
20. Keena Trowell, Assistant Professor, Mechanical Engineering; Faculty of Engineering
21. Nicole Wagner, Assistant Professor, Information Systems; Director of eHealth Graduate Programs; DeGroote School of Business
22. Margaret Zanel, Vice-President McMaster Alumni Association; Partner, Strategy and Leadership, Wentworth Strategy Group

4. Timeline

Service on the Committee shall be during the strategy development period, after which the Committee will be disbanded. It is expected that the Committee will be active from November 2025 to June 2026 with meetings anticipated to be every 3 to 4 weeks.

5. Duties of the Committee

a) To meet on a regular basis to ensure an efficient and effective workflow

b) To provide oversight to the design and implementation of a consultation process with internal and external stakeholders

c) To analyze information gathered from the consultation process along with other relevant information which may be gathered during the strategic development period

d) To develop a Setting the Course strategy based on the consultation process and other relevant information

e) To oversee the communication to the McMaster University community and other key external stakeholders using the web, social media, presentations, etc.

f) To oversee the development and implementation of an engagement and governance process for discussion of draft documents and approval of the Setting the Course strategy

6. Member Responsibilities

a) Regular meetings will be held, with members required to prepare prior to the meeting

b) Participation in the meetings will be in-person, but may be virtual/hybrid as well

c) If a member cannot regularly attend meetings, the Chair will take steps to find a replacement member

7. Duties of the Chair

a) To chair meetings of the Committee

b) To ensure that all Committee members have access to the information from the consultation process and other appropriate sources of information

c) To ensure that the website for the McMaster University community is updated with summary information from the Committee's work

d) To ensure that the work of the Committee is communicated to all key representative units of McMaster University

e) To ensure that the process is conducted in a timely manner with approval by Board of Governors in June 2026

8. Committee Support – Strategic Planning Team

A Strategic Planning Team will provide record keeping, required research and/or benchmarking, draft and presentation preparation, communications and consultation logistics. Membership of the Strategic Planning Team shall be comprised of:

Co-Chairs (x2)

1. Susan McCracken, Professor, Accounting & Financial Management Services
2. Nancy McKenzie, Director of Strategic Planning, Office of the President

Members (x9)

1. Amanda Baldwin Director, Strategic Initiatives, Office of the Vice-President (Operations and Finance)
2. Fernando Carneiro, Associate Director, Communications and Marketing, Office of the Provost
3. Laura Couchie, Communications Officer, Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous, Indigenous Education Council
4. Arlene Dosen, Assistant Dean and Executive Director, Student Success | Student Affairs
5. Joanne Gittens, Director, Office of Institutional Research & Analysis (IRA), Office of the Provost
6. Karen Knott, Administrator, Indigenous Initiatives, Office of the Vice Provost Indigenous, Indigenous Education Council
7. Karen Krueger, Administrative Assistant, Office of the President
8. Cheryl Louzado, Director, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Oppression, Equity and Inclusion Office
9. Kerry O'Brien, Advisor to the President, Strategic Projects, Office of the President

Advisors (x4)

1. Beverly Jacobs, Vice-Provost Indigenous; Associate Professor, Indigenous Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences
2. Karen McQuigge, Director, Alumni Engagement
3. Clare Mitchell, Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the President, Office of the President
4. Mark John Stewart, Managing Director, Wentworth Strategy Group; Industry Professor, McMaster University

9. Deliverable

A Setting the Course strategic vision that will be used to guide the McMaster University community from 2026-2031.

II SPT Terms of Reference

Setting the Course Strategic Planning Committee Terms of Reference

1. Background

McMaster University is entering a pivotal chapter in its institutional journey, marked by the recent appointment of President Susan Tighe. President Tighe's leadership presents a timely and transformative opportunity to reimagine the university's strategic direction. As McMaster continues to evolve in response to global challenges, societal shifts, and academic innovation, the development of a new strategic plan will serve as a foundational roadmap to guide priorities, investments, and impact over the coming years. The Strategic Planning Team is the operational group that will provide resource support to the Strategic Oversight Committee. Setting the Course will serve as the strategic framework underpinning planning development, priority identification, resource allocation and reporting on progress and will lead McMaster into the next phase of its journey.

2. Mandate

The Strategic Planning Team has key responsibilities for the day-to-day operations, design, structuring and implementation of the consultation activities, analysis of the results, and preparation of the initial strategy documents for review.

3. Membership (x11)

Membership of the Strategic Planning Team is comprised of individuals who have deep knowledge of the institution and its culture as well as strong project management, strategic planning, analytical, marketing and communication skills. Membership of the Strategic Planning Team shall be comprised of:

Co-Chairs (x2)

1. Susan McCracken, Professor, Accounting & Financial Management Services
2. Nancy McKenzie, Director of Strategic Planning, Office of the President

Members (x9)

3. Amanda Baldwin Director, Strategic Initiatives, Office of the Vice-President (Operations and Finance)
4. Fernando Carneiro, Associate Director, Communications and Marketing, Office of the Provost
5. Laura Couchie, Communications Officer, Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous, Indigenous Education Council
6. Arlene Dosen, Assistant Dean and Executive Director, Student Success | Student Affairs
7. Joanne Gittens, Director, Office of Institutional Research & Analysis (IRA), Office of the Provost
8. Karen Knott, Administrator, Indigenous Initiatives, Office of the Vice Provost Indigenous, Indigenous Education Council
9. Karen Krueger, Administrative Assistant, Office of the President
10. Cheryl Louzado, Director, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Oppression, Equity and Inclusion Office
11. Kerry O'Brien, Advisor to the President, Strategic Projects, Office of the President

Advisors to the Planning Team (x4)

Advisors to the planning team will be engaged on an as-needed basis and will be comprised of individuals who have expertise in strategy and governance; government relations; research and commercialization; university landscape; alumni engagement; and advancement; and EDI.

1. Beverly Jacobs, Vice-Provost Indigenous; Associate Professor, Indigenous Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences
2. Karen McQuigge, Director, Alumni Engagement
3. Clare Mitchell, Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the President, Office of the President
4. Mark John Stewart, Managing Director, Wentworth Strategy Group; Industry Professor, McMaster University

4. Timeline

Service on the Planning Team shall be during the strategy development period, after which the Planning Team will be disbanded. It is expected that the Planning Team will be active from October 2025 to June 2026 with weekly meetings and stakeholder engagements.

5. Duties of the Planning Team

a) **Operational Coordination**
Manage the day-to-day operations of the strategic planning process, ensuring timelines, milestones, and deliverables are met.

b) **Consultation Design and Delivery**
Develop and implement a comprehensive consultation strategy, including stakeholder mapping, engagement formats, and scheduling.

c) **Facilitation and Logistics**
Coordinate logistics for consultation sessions, workshops, and town halls, including communications, materials preparation, and technical support.

d) **Data Collection and Analysis**
Gather, synthesize, and analyze input from consultations, surveys, and benchmarking activities to inform strategic priorities.

e) **Drafting Strategic Documents**
Prepare initial drafts of strategic planning documents, including vision statements, strategic priorities, and implementation frameworks for the Strategic Oversight Committee's review.

f) **Research and Benchmarking**
Conduct environmental scans and comparative research to inform strategy development and ensure alignment with sector trends and best practices.

g) **Reporting and Documentation**
Maintain accurate records of meetings, decisions, and feedback, and prepare regular progress reports for the Strategic Oversight Committee.

h) **Stakeholder Communications**
Support the development and dissemination of communications materials to ensure transparency and engagement throughout the planning process.

i) **Integration and Alignment**
Ensure alignment of strategic planning activities with institutional goals, existing frameworks, and operational realities.

6. Member Responsibilities

a) Regular meetings will be held, with members required to prepare prior to the meeting

b) Participation in the meetings will be in-person, but may be virtual/hybrid as well

c) If a member cannot regularly attend meetings, the Chair will take steps to find a replacement member

7. Duties of the Co-Chairs

a) **Leadership and Oversight**
Provide overall leadership and direction to the Strategic Planning Team, ensuring alignment with the goals and expectations of the Strategic Oversight Committee.

b) **Strategic Coordination**
Coordinate the design, structure, and implementation of the strategic planning process, including consultation activities and stakeholder engagement.

c) **Team Management**
Facilitate collaboration among team members, delegate responsibilities effectively, and ensure timely delivery of key outputs.

d) **Liaison with Oversight Committee**
Serve as the primary point of contact between the Strategic Planning Team and the Strategic Oversight Committee, providing regular updates and seeking guidance as needed.

e) **Quality Assurance**
Review and approve consultation materials, analysis reports, and draft strategy documents prior to submission to the Strategic Oversight Committee.

f) **Decision-Making Support**
Guide the team in synthesizing input and evidence to support informed decision-making throughout the planning process.

g) **Stakeholder Engagement**
Represent the Strategic Planning Team in key engagement activities, including town halls, focus groups, and meetings with internal and external stakeholders.

h) **Risk and Issues Management**
Identify potential risks or challenges in the planning process and work proactively to address them in collaboration with relevant parties.

8. Deliverable

A draft Setting the Course strategic vision that will be submitted to the Strategic Oversight Committee no later than May 2026.

III Supporting Units of the Strategic Planning Process

Contributors	Title	Unit
Susan Tighe	President and Vice-Chancellor, SOC Chair	McMaster University
Nancy McKenzie	Director, Strategic Planning, SPT Co-Chair, SOC member	Office of the President
Susan McCracken	Professor, Area Chair, Accounting and Financial Management Services, SPT Co-Chair, SOC member	DeGroote School of Business
Strategic Planning Team Members and Advisors		
Amanda Baldwin	Director, Strategic Initiatives, SPT member	Office of the Vice-President (Operations and Finance)
Fernando Carneiro	Associate Director, Communications and Marketing, SPT member	Office of the Provost
Laura Couchie	Communications Officer, SPT member	Office of the Vice-Provost, Indigenous
Arlene Dosen	Assistant Dean and Executive Director of Student Success, SPT member	Student Affairs
Joanne Gittens	Director of Institutional Research and Analysis, SPT member	Institutional Research and Analysis
Karen Knott	Administrator of Indigenous Initiatives, SPT member	Office of the Vice-Provost, Indigenous and Indigenous Education Council
Karen Krueger	Administrative Assistant, Office of the President, SPT member	Office of the President
Cheryl Louzado	Director of Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Oppression, SPT member	Equity and Inclusion Office
Kerry O'Brien	Advisor to the President, Strategic Projects, SPT member	Office of the President
Beverly Jacobs	Vice-Provost, Indigenous; Advisor to the SPT and SOC member	Office of the Vice-Provost, Indigenous
Karen McQuigge	Director of Alumni Engagement and acting Director, Advancement Communications, Advisor to the SPT	University Advancement
Clare Mitchell	Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the President, Advisor to the SPT	Office of the President
Mark John Stewart	Industry Professor, Managing Director of Wentworth Strategy Group, Advisor to the SPT	Master of Communications Management (MCM) program
Strategic Oversight Committee Members		
Mike Ayers	Program Manager, Communications and Engagement, SOC member	Faculty of Health Sciences
Monique Beech	Executive Director, Strategic Communications, SOC member	Faculty of Engineering
Kusum Bhatta	GSA President, SOC member	Graduate Students Association
Katherine Cuff	Professor, Department of Economics, SOC member	Faculty of Social Sciences
Brent Davis	University Council, SOC member	Office of Legal Services
Darran Fernandez	University Registrar, SOC member	Office of the Registrar
Bonnie Freeman	Academic Co-chair, Indigenous Education Council, Associate Professor, School of Social Work and Indigenous Studies, SOC member	Faculty of Health Sciences
Bhagwati Gupta	Professor, Department of Biology, SOC member	Faculty of Science
Jennifer Heisz	Professor, Department of Kinesiology, SOC member	Faculty of Science
Violetta Igneski	Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, SOC member	Faculty of Humanities

Contributors	Title	Unit
Natalia Lishchyna	Board of Governors member, SOC member	Board of Governors
Piper Plavins	MSU President (2025-2026), SOC member	McMaster Students Union
Jen Power	Senior Director, Development, SOC member	Faculty of Health Sciences
Mariam Saleem	MSU President (2026-2027), SOC member	McMaster Students Union
Sara Salimi	Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Chemical Engineering, Sheardown Lab, SOC member	Faculty of Engineering
Jonathan Sherbino	Professor, Department of Medicine, Assistant Dean, Health Professions Education Research, SOC member	Faculty of Health Sciences
Keena Trowell	Assistant Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, SOC member	Faculty of Engineering
Nicole Wagner	Assistant Professor, Information Systems, SOC member	DeGroote School of Business
Margaret Zanel	Partner, Strategy and Leadership, Wentworth Strategy Group, Vice-President McMaster Alumni Association, McMaster Senate member, SOC member	Senate
Institutional Research and Analysis		
Arman Edalatmand	Information & Data Analyst	Institutional Research and Analysis
Alice Nykolayeva	Jr. BI Specialist	Institutional Research and Analysis
Edgar Soler	Senior Project Analyst	Institutional Research and Analysis
Martin Stelmach	Statistician & Programmer	Institutional Research and Analysis
Daniel Wilding	Information & Data Analyst	Institutional Research and Analysis
Communications and Marketing		
Devansh Arora	Marketing Coordinator	Communications
Caelan Beard	Communications Coordinator, Content	Communications
Matt Clarke	Creative Services Team Lead	Communications
Michelle Donovan	Interim Executive Director, Strategic Communications	Communications
Beth Gallagher	Associate Director, Communications	Communications
Georgia Kirkos	Photographer	Communications
Maureen Lawlor	Social Media Lead	Communications
Anthony Lucic	Marketing Manager, Digital	Communications
Sara Morgan	Manager, Brand Marketing	Communications
Lisa Polewski	Content Specialist	Communications
Richard Valentine	Director, Marketing	Communications
Sonia Verma	Manager, Strategic Communications	Communications
Mark Zanin	Video Specialist	Communications

IV Internal and External Focus Groups

A comprehensive and inclusive approach to engagement ensured diverse perspectives from across the university community and external partners informed the development of the strategic plan.

Governance
Senate
Board
Chancellors
Past Presidents

Senior Leadership
President, Vice-Presidents
Provost Council
Faculty Deans
Associate Vice-Presidents Office of the Vice-President Research
Vice-President Operations and Finance Leadership (Admin Strats)
AVPs University Advancement

Faculties, Departments and Areas
University Secretariat Office
Faculty Council Meetings
McMaster Continuing Education
MacPherson Institute
Office of Community Engagement
Office of International Affairs
Equity and Inclusion Office
Museum
Library
Registrar
University Technology Services
Athletics and Recreation
Ombuds
Legal Services
Facilities
McMaster Industry Liaison Office
University Advancement
Communications, Marketing and Public Affairs
Human Resources

Faculty
McMaster University Faculty Association Executive
Associate Deans Research
Associate Deans Undergraduate
Associate Deans Graduate
Directors of Research Institutes and Centres, Canada Research Chairs and Endowed Research Chairs
Faculty Sessions
Teaching Professors / Teaching Stream Faculty
Teaching and Learning Consortium
Digital Learning Strategic Framework Team and Advisory
Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning Portfolio Leads
Clinical Faculty

Indigenous, Black & Employee Resource Groups
Indigenous Faculty and Staff with representation from the Vice-Provost Indigenous Office, Indigenous Education Council, Joint Indigenous-Administrative Consultation Group, Indigenous Studies Department, Indigenous Student Services, and Indigenous Health Learning Lodge
Faculty and Unit/Department EDI Leads
President's Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community
Latin American Network at Mac
Black, Indigenous, Racialized Staff Employee Resource Group
PrideAtMac Employee Resource Group
Employee Accessibility Network
African-Caribbean Faculty Association of McMaster

Staff
Unifor Sessions
TMG Sessions
Unifor Executive
Finance leaders
Directors of Finance and Administration
Academic Administration and Finance Managers
McMaster University Academic Librarians Association

Learners
McMaster Students Union
Graduate Students Association
Undergraduate and Postgraduate Medical Education
Student Athletes
Student Clubs
Post-Doctoral students

Campus Life
Student Affairs
Career Leaders
Physical Activity Centre of Excellence
McMaster Institute for Research on Aging

Ancillary Partners
Campus Store
Hospitality Services
Media Production Services
Parking Services

Community Members
McMaster University Retirees Association
President's Advisory Committee on Natural Lands
Hamilton Community Partners
McMaster Innovation Park
The Forge
Niagara campus
Waterloo campus
President's Advisory Committee on Community Relations
Alumni

Students collaborate on campus, reflecting the diverse perspectives engaged throughout the planning process.

V Survey Questions

Main Setting the Course Survey Questions

- What makes you proud to be part of the McMaster community?
- What are the biggest challenges McMaster will face in the next five years?
- What are the biggest opportunities for McMaster in the next five years?
- What values do you believe should guide McMaster as we set our direction for the future?
- Looking ahead to 2031, what should McMaster look like when we're at our best?
- What areas of leadership or innovation should McMaster strive to be known for?
- How should we measure McMaster's success over the next five years?
- In 2030, McMaster will celebrate its 100th anniversary in Hamilton, an important milestone on our path towards 2031 and beyond. Is there anything else you want the committee to consider as the new strategic plan is developed?

Alumni Survey Questions

- Looking ahead what should what should be McMaster's top priorities over the next five years to best prepare students for the future?
- How would you most like to see McMaster strengthen its impact beyond campus in the years ahead?
- What role do you think graduates can play in shaping McMaster's future over the next five years?

Employer Survey Questions

- Looking ahead what should be McMaster's top priorities over the next five years to best prepare students for the workforce?
- What differentiating strengths should McMaster build on to stand out as a preferred partner for employers over the next five years?

Community Survey Questions

- Looking ahead what should what should be McMaster's top priorities over the next five years to best serve the community?
- In your experience, what does McMaster do particularly well?
- How does McMaster make a meaningful contribution to the Hamilton community?
- As McMaster approaches its 100th year in Hamilton, what special initiatives or opportunities should the university pursue over the next five years to strengthen its impact on the community?

Industry Survey Questions

- Looking ahead, what should be McMaster's top priorities over the next five years to best support the needs of our external partners?
- From your perspective, what does McMaster do particularly well in its engagement with partners?
- What barriers or challenges, if any, have you encountered when working with McMaster?
- In what ways could McMaster strengthen its contribution to innovation, talent, development, and economic growth?

Government Partners Survey Questions

- How can McMaster best support government priorities and serve the public good over the next five years?
- Where do you see the greatest opportunities for McMaster to strengthen or evolve its partnerships with government and the public sector to increase impact?

University Hall, the historic centre of McMaster's Hamilton campus, symbolizes our university's tradition of academic excellence and the foundation on which the next strategic chapter is being built.

McMaster University

Graduates make their way through the University Hall arch together, a reminder that McMaster's future will be built collectively.

The development of Bolder Together marks the beginning, not the end, of McMaster's next chapter. Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and shared their perspectives, experiences, dreams and aspirations throughout this process. The work starts now. Faculty, staff, students, researchers, alumni and partners will build what comes next, together.

Office of the President
1280 Main St. W. Hamilton, ON L8S 4L8

president.mcmaster.ca/bolder-together