

Strategic, Tactical, and Operational Framework

Glossary of Key Terms

Roxbury Community College

Core Concepts

Strategic Thinking

Definition: The ability to envision long-term institutional direction, anticipate future challenges and opportunities, and make decisions that position the organization for sustained success over 3-5+ years.

RCC Example: President and Board deciding to pursue the Associate to Master's (A2M) model as a cornerstone of RCC's economic mobility mission, recognizing that bachelor's degrees alone are insufficient for high-wage careers in healthcare and technology.

Key Characteristics:

- Future-oriented (3-5+ years)
 - Institution-wide scope
 - Requires Board/Presidential approval
 - Focuses on competitive positioning
 - Involves significant resource commitments
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Tactical Planning

Definition: The process of translating strategic vision into concrete programs, initiatives, and resource allocation decisions over a 6-24 month timeframe.

RCC Example: The VP of Academic Affairs and Dean of Health Sciences designing the curriculum map for the Nursing to Healthcare Administration A2M pathway, including course sequencing, articulation agreements with Northeastern, scholarship application processes, and faculty professional development.

Key Characteristics:

- Medium-term horizon (6-24 months)
 - Department or program-level scope
 - Managed by VPs, Deans, Directors
 - Involves resource allocation and coordination
 - Creates the “bridge” between vision and execution
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Operational Execution

Definition: The daily, weekly, and monthly activities that directly serve students and keep the institution functioning effectively.

RCC Example: A faculty member teaching BIO 234 (Anatomy & Physiology II) in the Health Sciences Building, ensuring students master content required for transfer to Northeastern’s A2M program; an advisor meeting with a student to review A2M eligibility requirements and scholarship deadlines.

Key Characteristics:

- Short-term, recurring activities (daily/weekly/monthly)
 - Individual or team-level scope
 - Executed by faculty, staff, frontline employees
 - Focuses on quality, consistency, and student experience
 - Creates the “moment of truth” for students
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RCC-Specific Terms

5Ps Framework

Definition: RCC’s strategic planning framework consisting of Purpose, People, Place, Programs, and Partnerships—the five pillars that guide institutional decision-making.

Strategic Application: Board approves the 5Ps as the organizing structure for the Roxbury 2030 Strategic Plan.

Tactical Application: Each VP develops initiatives aligned with one or more of the 5Ps (e.g., VP of Facilities focuses on “Place” through campus modernization).

Operational Application: Faculty and staff understand which of the 5Ps their daily work supports (e.g., advisors support “People” through student success interventions).

A2M (Associate to Master’s) Program

Definition: A partnership model between RCC and Northeastern University that allows students to earn an associate degree at RCC (tuition-free), transfer to Northeastern for a bachelor’s degree, and continue directly to a master’s degree with scholarship support—creating a debt-free pathway to graduate education.

Strategic Significance: Positions RCC as a national leader in economic mobility by eliminating the financial barriers that prevent low-income students from accessing graduate education and high-wage careers.

Tactical Implementation: Requires curriculum alignment, articulation agreements, scholarship coordination, student advising protocols, and faculty collaboration across institutions.

Operational Impact: Faculty must prepare students for transfer success; advisors must identify A2M-eligible students early; staff must process scholarship applications efficiently.

PBI (Predominantly Black Institution) Designation

Definition: Federal designation for institutions where at least 40% of students are Black/African American and at least 50% of students are low-income. RCC holds this designation, which unlocks access to federal grant funding.

Strategic Value: Provides \$2-5M annually in federal funding to support student success initiatives, faculty development, and infrastructure improvements.

Tactical Use: Institutional Advancement writes grant applications targeting PBI-specific funding opportunities; Academic Affairs designs programs that serve PBI student populations.

Operational Benefit: Additional resources support tutoring, advising, technology access, and other student support services.

Roxbury 2030 Strategic Plan

Definition: RCC's comprehensive 5-year strategic plan (2025-2030) outlining the institution's vision to become a national model for economic mobility and community transformation.

Strategic Goals: Expand A2M pathways, modernize campus facilities, strengthen community partnerships, increase completion rates, and enhance institutional reputation.

Tactical Priorities: Each VP develops annual operational plans that advance specific Roxbury 2030 goals.

Operational Alignment: All employees should understand how their work contributes to at least one Roxbury 2030 priority.

Framework Terminology

Strategic Drift

Definition: The phenomenon where an organization has a clear strategic vision but fails to implement tactical plans or operational changes, resulting in the vision

remaining aspirational rather than becoming reality.

RCC Example: If RCC’s leadership declares “We will be a national model for economic mobility” but doesn’t invest in A2M program expansion, faculty development, or student support services, the vision remains hollow.

Prevention: Ensure every strategic goal has corresponding tactical initiatives and operational metrics.

Tactical Chaos

Definition: The situation where an organization launches multiple programs and initiatives without clear strategic alignment, resulting in resource fragmentation and competing priorities.

RCC Example: If every department launches its own transfer partnership without coordination, students receive conflicting information, resources are duplicated, and the institution lacks a coherent narrative about its transfer mission.

Prevention: Require all new initiatives to demonstrate alignment with strategic priorities before approval.

Operational Myopia

Definition: When employees focus exclusively on daily tasks without understanding how their work connects to broader institutional goals, leading to disengagement and missed opportunities for innovation.

RCC Example: A faculty member who teaches courses without understanding how the curriculum prepares students for A2M transfer, or an advisor who processes paperwork without recognizing their role in economic mobility.

Prevention: Communicate the “why” behind operational work; help employees see the impact of their contributions.

Alignment

Definition: The state where strategic vision, tactical plans, and operational execution are mutually reinforcing, creating a coherent institutional direction.

RCC Example: The strategic goal of economic mobility is supported by tactical A2M program development, which is executed operationally through high-quality teaching, proactive advising, and efficient scholarship processing.

Measurement: Alignment can be assessed by asking: “Can every employee explain how their work supports RCC’s strategic goals?”

Cascade Effect

Definition: The process by which strategic decisions flow down through tactical planning to operational execution, with each level translating the priorities of the level above into concrete actions.

RCC Example:

1. **Strategic:** Board approves expansion of A2M partnerships (WHERE)
 2. **Tactical:** VP of Academic Affairs identifies Information Technology as the next A2M field and negotiates partnership terms (HOW)
 3. **Operational:** IT faculty revise curriculum to meet transfer requirements and advisors begin identifying eligible students (WHAT)
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Decision-Making Terms

Strategic Decision

Definition: A high-stakes, long-term decision that shapes institutional direction and requires significant resource commitment.

RCC Examples:

- Pursuing PBI designation (already achieved)
- Partnering with Northeastern for A2M programs

- Investing \$10M in campus modernization
- Expanding to offer bachelor's degrees (hypothetical)

Decision-Makers: President, Board of Trustees, Senior Leadership

Tactical Decision

Definition: A medium-term decision about program design, resource allocation, or partnership development that implements strategic priorities.

RCC Examples:

- Which A2M pathways to prioritize (Healthcare, IT, Business, Education)
- How to allocate \$500K in PBI grant funding across departments
- Whether to hire additional advisors or invest in advising technology
- Which courses to offer in summer vs. fall semester

Decision-Makers: VPs, Deans, Department Heads, Program Directors

Operational Decision

Definition: A day-to-day decision about service delivery, process execution, or student support.

RCC Examples:

- How to structure a lab activity to maximize student learning
- Which students to prioritize for advising appointments
- How to respond to a student's financial aid question
- Whether to extend an assignment deadline for a student

Decision-Makers: Faculty, Advisors, Staff, Frontline Employees

Timeframe Terminology

Long-Term (Strategic)

Definition: 3-5+ years; the timeframe for institutional transformation and competitive repositioning.

RCC Example: Becoming a national model for economic mobility by 2030 requires sustained effort across multiple years.

Medium-Term (Tactical)

Definition: 6-24 months; the timeframe for program development and initiative implementation.

RCC Example: Designing and launching a new A2M pathway in Information Technology takes 12-18 months from initial planning to first student cohort.

Short-Term (Operational)

Definition: Daily, weekly, monthly; the timeframe for routine activities and student services.

RCC Example: Teaching a course, advising a student, processing a form—these happen on a daily or weekly basis.

Stakeholder Roles

Leadership Team

Composition: President, Board of Trustees, VPs, Senior Administrators

Primary Responsibility: Strategic thinking and decision-making; setting institutional direction; allocating major resources; ensuring alignment across all levels.

RCC Example: President leads the development of Roxbury 2030 Strategic Plan and presents it to the Board for approval.

Middle Management

Composition: Deans, Department Heads, Program Directors, Managers

Primary Responsibility: Tactical planning and execution; translating strategic vision into programs; coordinating resources; managing teams.

RCC Example: Dean of Health Sciences designs the A2M Healthcare Administration pathway, including curriculum, partnerships, and faculty assignments.

Frontline Employees

Composition: Faculty, Advisors, Support Staff, Administrative Assistants

Primary Responsibility: Operational execution; delivering high-quality student services; implementing processes; providing feedback on what's working.

RCC Example: Faculty teach courses that prepare students for transfer; advisors guide students through A2M application process; staff process scholarship paperwork.

Performance Measurement

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Definition: Quantifiable metrics used to evaluate success at each organizational level.

Strategic KPIs (RCC):

- Graduate earnings 5 years post-completion
- Transfer rates to 4-year institutions
- National rankings and recognition
- PBI federal funding secured

Tactical KPIs (RCC):

- Number of A2M pathways established
- Students enrolled in transfer programs
- Partnership agreements signed
- Faculty professional development hours

Operational KPIs (RCC):

- Course completion rates
 - Student satisfaction scores
 - Advising appointment attendance
 - Financial aid processing time
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Leading vs. Lagging Indicators

Leading Indicators: Predictive metrics that signal future outcomes (e.g., number of students advised about A2M programs predicts future transfer rates).

Lagging Indicators: Historical metrics that measure past outcomes (e.g., actual transfer rates from last year).

RCC Example: Number of A2M scholarship applications (leading) predicts future graduate degree attainment (lagging).

Communication Terms

Strategic Communication

Definition: High-level messaging about institutional vision, mission, and long-term direction; typically delivered by President or Board.

RCC Example: President's State of the College address outlining progress toward Roxbury 2030 goals.

Tactical Communication

Definition: Program-specific information about initiatives, resources, and implementation plans; typically delivered by VPs or Deans.

RCC Example: Dean's email to Health Sciences faculty explaining new A2M curriculum requirements and transfer protocols.

Operational Communication

Definition: Day-to-day information about tasks, schedules, procedures, and student services; typically delivered by supervisors or team leads.

RCC Example: Department meeting agenda covering course schedules, advising caseloads, and upcoming deadlines.

Integration Concepts

Vertical Alignment

Definition: The degree to which strategic, tactical, and operational levels are mutually reinforcing and working toward the same goals.

RCC Example: When the strategic goal of economic mobility is supported by tactical A2M program development and operational excellence in teaching and advising, the institution has strong vertical alignment.

Horizontal Alignment

Definition: The degree to which different departments and units at the same organizational level coordinate and collaborate effectively.

RCC Example: When Health Sciences, IT, and Business departments all use the same A2M partnership model and share best practices, the institution has strong horizontal alignment.

Feedback Loops

Definition: Mechanisms for information to flow upward from operational to tactical to strategic levels, ensuring leaders understand implementation challenges and can adjust accordingly.

RCC Example: Faculty report that students struggle with transfer application deadlines → Dean adjusts advising protocols → VP revises partnership agreements to simplify the process.

Prepared by Manus AI for Roxbury Community College

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