



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA

2023

What We Heard: Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation Consultation Sessions

Prepared by Berlin Communications



Executive Summary

This report presents an overview of the consultation sessions conducted to inform the development of the University of Alberta's **Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation** (SPRI). A total of 16 sessions took place between April 28th and May 18th, 2023, aiming to capture diverse perspectives by accommodating different groups, including faculty members, researchers, administrators, government partners, and industry representatives.

We had 269 participants engage within the formal consultation process. This figure does not include participants such as the Working Group members or University of Alberta staff involved in drafting the SPRI. Of the 269 total participants, 77 participants attended virtually, 9 submitted comments through an online feedback form, and 44 participants remained mostly silent throughout the sessions.

Valuable feedback, recommendations, and actionable insights were shared throughout these sessions, leading to several noteworthy changes and actions, broadly categorized into three sections: content, format/language, and strategic communications. We have outlined a series of recommendations for updating the SPRI document to reflect the feedback we heard.

Content Changes: Key areas addressed included highlighting areas of world-leading expertise, promoting work-life balance, emphasizing overall researcher support, prioritizing quality of outcomes over quantity, exploring co-ownership of data and research, improving communication of research goals, clarifying the role of centres and institutes, integrating Indigenous perspectives, and focusing on social disparities.

Format/Language Changes: Recommendations in this category centered around using inspiring language, avoiding exploitative terms, highlighting community-led research, incorporating visual elements, ensuring consistent formatting, and appropriately engaging with Indigenous perspectives in language usage.

Strategic Communications: Participants stressed the importance of engagement with industry and community, alignment with innovation strategies, establishment of a research impact and community engagement unit, clarifying how the plan captures research impact for external partners, and creating an inspiring narrative for the SPRI.

Each consultation session was a crucial step towards shaping a comprehensive, inclusive, and future-focused SPRI. This final report serves as a testament to the collective effort and collaborative dialogue that underpins the University of Alberta's commitment to driving research and innovation.

Summary Themes

During the consultation process for the **Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation** at the University of Alberta, participants shared valuable insights that shaped the high-level themes and overarching perspectives on the plan. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives and expectations.

Embracing Narrative and Identity: Participants expressed a desire for a compelling and inclusive narrative that goes beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. They emphasized the importance of recognizing the university's unique strengths and diverse research areas. Participants sought a narrative that reflects the province's impact, highlights the University's transformative nature, and showcases its global leadership in research. They also underscored the significance of language and messaging that demonstrates the university's commitment to reconciliation and inclusivity.

Expanding Areas of Focus: Participants called for a broader focus that encompasses social justice, Indigenous studies, and land-based knowledge. They recommended highlighting specific areas such as arts and fine arts, health research, and the university's expertise in sectors like oil and gas. Participants emphasized the need to align the plan with global challenges, sustainability goals, and growth areas such as agriculture and agri-food. They also emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and bridging the gap between different disciplines to create well-rounded students and citizens.

Cultivating Collaboration and Partnerships: Participants emphasized the importance of fostering collaboration and partnerships with industry, government, and external organizations. They stressed the need to engage and involve Indigenous communities, incorporating their perspectives and research needs. Participants also highlighted the significance of strengthening relationships with countries in the Global South and positioning the University as a desirable partner. They called for clearer pathways and roadmaps for engagement, aligning with national innovation conversations, and leveraging existing partnerships and networks.

Enhancing Support and Development: Consultation participants recommended efforts to address infrastructure needs, administrative burdens, and support for research administration. They emphasized the importance of addressing these challenges to facilitate research activities. Participants called for greater support in areas such as recruitment, retention, and early career academic development. They also stressed the need for mentorship, teaching, and support for undergraduate and graduate research. The value of nurturing future research leaders, promoting entrepreneurship, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration were heavily emphasized.

Effective Plan Communication and Implementation: Participants highlighted the need for effective communication of the SPRI to all relevant groups. They suggested the importance of clear and specific goals and objectives that are ambitious yet achievable. Participants pointed to the need for transparency, accountability, and ongoing engagement throughout the implementation process. They called for incorporating feedback, monitoring progress, and adjusting as needed to ensure the successful execution of the plan. Participants also emphasized the importance of user-friendly language, clarity in key indicators and actions, and effective dissemination of the plan's goals and achievements.

Appendix A: Key Insights by Consultation Question

Question 1: What story (or stories) do you see evolving in the SPRI about research and innovation at the University of Alberta? Do you think this story (or these stories) will distinguish the U of A uniquely when compared to other institutions, and highlight the impact it has?

- Attendees expressed a desire for a more comprehensive narrative that includes diverse research areas, acknowledges the province's impact, and recognizes and expands upon the University's unique strengths.
- The document should focus more on tangible impacts and include research beyond discovery-based fields, highlighting the importance of Indigenous and community-led research.
- Attendees emphasized the need for an inspiring narrative that reflects the University's transformative nature, commitment to innovation, and global leadership in research.
- Concerns were raised about the document's approach to expansion, growth, redundancies, clarity, and its sensitivity to non-named faculties and different research areas.
- Attendees indicated a desire for more self-reflection, focus on personal growth, emphasis on inquiry, and exploration of different ways of thinking. They also suggested addressing barriers to collaboration and clarifying the term "global".
- The document could consider climate change and Indigenous research, as well as provide support for a broader range of research areas.
- The SPRI could emphasize the importance of resiliency and acknowledge the challenges faced by researchers, including recruitment and pandemic-related issues.
- The document could also highlight the need for more specific goals, research applications support, funding for graduate students, and increasing awareness.
- The SPRI could be more user-friendly and highlight areas of leadership, including infrastructure, undergraduate involvement, and research support

Question 2: After reading the goals, objectives, and tactics, which ones resonate with you the most? Why? / (External) When you view the plan holistically, is it focused and targeted to engage with communities and support the needs of industry or government? / (Indigenous and Native Studies) If you're familiar with the Braiding Past, Present and Future: University of Alberta Indigenous Strategic Plan, how do you see both documents aligning?

- Attendees expressed a desire for a heightened focus on teaching and education, emphasizing how nurturing future leaders can be achieved through better support for undergraduate research, strengthened early career support, and preparation for future challenges.
- Participants suggested prioritizing global partnerships, particularly with developing countries, to broaden the University's impact.
- Attendees suggested that the communication of the plan's applicability could be improved across all disciplines, including social sciences, humanities, and fine arts.

- Attendees appreciated and further encouraged the emphasis on infrastructure needs and reducing administrative burdens to facilitate research activities.
- There were suggestions to specify the role of centres and institutes within the research ecosystem and provide sufficient resources for them to support research and collaboration.
- Consider Indigenous perspectives, language, and values throughout the plan and a stronger emphasis on social justice, and land-based knowledge.
- Strengthened collaboration with industry, government, and external partners and clearer engagement roadmaps was articulated as an important piece.
- Highlight the University's strengths, aligning the plan with national innovation conversations and provide more specific examples.
- Prioritizing health-related research and enhancing knowledge mobilization strategies was recommended.
- Tackling recruitment, retention, development, and support challenges for researchers and their families was frequently highlighted as a need.
- Attendees consistently suggested aligning the plan with global challenges.
- Attendees stressed the importance of entrepreneurship and providing robust support for spin-offs and startups.

Question 3: In your opinion, do the goals, objectives, and tactics adequately respond to the significant trends, drivers, challenges, and opportunities shaping research and innovation in the world today? If yes, how does it do this? If not, what is missing?

- Balancing between university rankings, reputation, and research impact is considered important.
- Attendees urged the use of language that promotes mutual benefits and reciprocity in partnerships.
- They also highlighted the need to connect community involvement in research to student recruitment and engagement.
- It was suggested that the definition of health should be consistent and broad, focusing on holistic solutions.
- Attendees recommended the prioritization of mentorship, teaching, and students' roles within the plan, advocating for the fostering of a supportive, inclusive research culture that adeptly manages workload and environmental concerns.
- Attendees believe it is crucial to acknowledge the University's historical shortcomings with honesty and to intensify the focus on the humanities, showing a commitment to continuous improvement and diverse academic fields.
- Addressing faculty renewal, attrition, capacity concerns, and the importance of competitive salaries is regarded as important.
- Attendees emphasized the importance of open access, open education, and open science.
- They also suggested incorporating long-term impact considerations and democratic institutions into the plan.
- It was proposed that some acknowledgement of the feasibility of achieving stated tactics and indicators is important.

- Attendees consider the balance between commercialization and knowledge generation important and understand it is difficult.
- Attendees recommend increasing community engagement and translating knowledge to the community, focusing on Indigenous relationships.

Question 4: Do you have any feedback on the key indicators or suggestions for additional key indicators? / (External) Does this Plan align with the priorities of your organization or sector? Does it motivate you to engage or partner with the University on research and innovation activities? Are there any major areas of focus that are missing?

- Attendees emphasized the importance of aligning the plan's indicators with internal processes and international goals such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.
- Clear and appropriate language throughout the document was highlighted, with specific attention to terms like "tactics" and language surrounding Indigeneity and Indigenous research.
- Suggestions were made to consider alternative metrics for research impact and foster an entrepreneurial culture within the institution.
- Attendees stressed the need for effective data collection methods to capture diverse research outcomes.
- Key indicators should be relevant to different audience needs, qualitative to provide a more holistic view, and better aligned with the plan's priorities.
- Incorporating support systems for securing Tri-Council funding and implementing efficient measures to track progress was recommended.
- The plan should acknowledge the impact of the pandemic and address decolonization and anti-oppression.
- Attendees emphasized the importance of involving partners in decision-making processes and ensuring transparency in indicator data production.

Question 5: Will this plan advance the impact of the University of Alberta? If so, in what ways? If not, what is missing?

- Attendees believed the plan could enhance the University's societal impact and position it as a desirable partner by providing a framework for research efforts.
- Successful implementation and effective communication were seen as catalysts to energize researchers and administrators, fostering hope and positivity.
- The importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and community impact was emphasized, along with better alignment with the Indigenous Strategic Plan.
- Balancing ambition for funding with a focus on humanities and arts may not be as financially lucrative was suggested for consideration.
- Exploring synergies with other institutions in Alberta was seen as a way to strengthen the University's impact.
- Continuous engagement and incorporating feedback into ongoing implementation were deemed essential.
- Providing incentives to encourage exploration of new research areas and ensuring infrastructure and funding support were seen as crucial.
- The achievement of key indicators would demonstrate impact, but attention to implementation details, milestones, and setting realistic expectations was also emphasized.

Question 6: What immediate successes/achievements do you see this plan enabling when it is implemented? [NOTE: this question was often not asked or reworded as final advice]

- The recognition and acknowledgment of attendee input and the importance of policies were seen as immediate successes, further ensuring attendees feel informed, interested, inspired, and involved.
- The role of the Indigenous Strategic Plan as a model for strategic planning should be recognized.
- Addressing the need for tangible change and alleviating concerns about potential inaction were seen as positive outcomes.
- Attendees highlighted the importance of mitigating tensions and competition among equity-denied groups.
- Recognizing the importance of tangible change, interdisciplinary collaboration, and clear pathways for researchers were seen as immediate successes.
- Acknowledging achievements in faculty renewal and critical infrastructure recognition were noted.
- Consideration of social betterment as a key pillar was suggested.



Office of the Vice-President (Research and Innovation)

2-51 South Academic Building

University of Alberta

Edmonton, AB

Canada T6G 2G7

ualberta.ca/research