



Closing the Loop on MSU Planning, Budgeting, and Assessment

Efforts to develop and refine a more procedurally explicit and institutionally inclusive model of budgeting and planning, which prioritizes relevant data from programmatic and administrative assessment, is well under way. Additionally, updates to the [annual budget process and timeline](#) have been developed, made, and approved. However, while this document specifies a cycle, with beginning and end points, it is not clear regarding the justifications for why the loop was closed the way it was; namely, why budget request X instead of budget request Y was funded. Rather, what is noted is general in scope. More specifically, budget presentations that connect requests to the strategic plan will be prioritized, but in what order and why is still undeclared.

In an effort to proactively address as many “soft spots” as possible it is warranted that this ambiguity be remedied with the production of a set of criteria that will complement strategic planning prioritization with more specific reasoning. Faculty Senate and Staff Senate produced a set of criteria that is easily tailored to incorporate most, if not all, offices on campus. The following rubric, see Table 1, is an example of how to accomplish this specific end.

Each criterion is used to assess a specific “how” related to a specific “what” of the strategic plan. For instance, if an academic or administrative department wanted \$5000 for a piece of equipment, a relevant request under Strategic Goal 1, then the presenter should argue for specifically how said equipment improves the quality of student learning and/or experience. Once the budget request is heard each reviewer will convey, in Table 1, how connected they believe the request is within the current budget environment/cycle.

Table 1: Budget Presentation Connection to Strategic Plan Rating Scale

Criteria	1= No Justification	2 = Not Connected	3 = Limited Connection	4 = Connected	5 = Strongly Connected
Request supports and/or prioritizes an increase in student enrollment and/or retention at MSU (Goals 2 & 3).					
Request supports initiatives that improve the quality of student learning and/or student experiences at MSU (Goals 1 & 4).					
Request supports and/or prioritizes community engagement and partnerships . (Goal 5).					
Request prioritizes professional development and/or compensation/benefits for faculty and staff. (Goal 6).					
Request prioritizes physical plant upgrades (Goal 4).					
SPBC reviewer comments relating to budget item/presentation. Reviewer should consider if presentation addressed cost savings or controls.					

For the above rating scale, the following definitions apply:

- **Strongly connected.** The rationale justifies the request explicitly as a response to assessment findings and describes specific expected effects on unit objectives.
- **Connected.** The rationale identifies specific findings and planning effects or benefits, and links effects or benefits to data.
- **Limited connection.** The rationale mentions relevant effects or findings but without specifying them in detail or explicitly connecting findings and effects.
- **Not connected.** The rationale provides little justification beyond unsubstantiated assertions.
- **No Justification.** The rationale simply describes the request in more detail (e.g., itemizing the use of funds requested) without offering any justification.

While the above rubric is not as robust as desired, it does provide a transparent rationale for why the university prioritizes budget allocations. Such transparency of process would be helpful to internal and external stakeholders.