

HiClarity's Human-Centered Design Approach to Strategic Planning

What Makes Our Process Different

Most strategic planning processes start with a predetermined framework, strategic plan template, or consultant methodology. Our process begins with understanding your organization's and stakeholders' met and unmet needs.

Using human-centered design (HCD) principles, we begin with deep discovery to identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities within the communities you serve as well as your current programming. From there, we collaboratively design a planning process that's responsive to what we learn together, drawing on proven strategic frameworks as they serve the work.

How this process unfolds matters as much as how it's designed, which is why expert discussion facilitation is critical. HiClarity Facilitation brings two decades of experience facilitating conversations where every voice is heard, dialogue stays focused and generative, and groups move from ideas to real decisions.

The result is strategic direction that's grounded in real stakeholder experiences, co-created by diverse voices, and designed for implementation.

Our Typical Process

The following represents our typical arc. The specific methods, timing, and emphasis within each phase, however, are shaped by what we discover at the outset and adjusted as we learn along the way.

Phase 1: Empathize and Define

Through focus groups and conversations, we engage clients and customers, partners, staff, board, and leadership. We discover what's working well, where there's friction and room to grow, and what people aspire to. We complement these conversations with AI-generated industry analysis, competitive scans, and trend identification to ground our planning in the current context.

What moves forward: A clear picture of stakeholders' met and unmet needs, organizational realities, relevant industry trends, and early insights that will shape strategic direction.

Phase 2: Ideate and Converge

We facilitate sessions that explore multiple possible futures, which are responsive to findings and new insights from Phase 1. Our human-centered design process, combined with AI support, incorporates key elements from proven frameworks like SOAR, SWOT, and Appreciative Inquiry where they serve the work. Throughout this phase, AI can quickly synthesize what participants envision, drafting options for vision and mission in real-time for the group to refine. From there,

we develop and narrow toward three strategic directions, then stress-test them against different possible futures before taking them to stakeholders.

What moves forward: Vision, mission, and three strategic directions ready for testing.

Phase 3: Prototype & Test

We test Phase 2 outputs with stakeholders to assess whether they resonate, reflect stakeholder input, and feel achievable. AI can quickly synthesize feedback across stakeholder conversations, surfacing patterns and tensions so we can refine quickly. We iterate until the vision, mission, and strategic direction resonate.

What moves forward: A validated vision, mission, and strategic direction, and a clearer understanding of what implementation will require. From here, we either document the plan (Path A) or continue into Phase 4 for facilitated implementation planning (Path B). Within Path A, there are three options for documentation: **Client-Led**, where your team writes the plan using our session summaries and synthesized outputs (builds deepest ownership and is most affordable); **Collaborative**, where we share the writing and refine each other's work (balances efficiency with ownership); or **Consultant-Led**, where HiClarity writes the full plan (reduces ownership and is most expensive).

Phase 4: Plan and Prepare

We facilitate conversations that detail what's needed to move from strategy to action, including shifts within leadership, staff, and organizational systems. With that clarity, we map the steps to get there, assign ownership and timelines, and establish processes to ensure follow-through. AI can support these conversations by surfacing blind spots the group hasn't addressed, connecting dependencies across implementation elements, and benchmarking how similar organizations have tackled comparable challenges.

At the conclusion of Path B, the same documentation options apply (Client-Led, Collaborative, or Consultant-Led), with the addition of the implementation plan.

A Note on AI

HiClarity has been successfully testing ways to improve and accelerate planning processes with AI, including real-time synthesis, on-demand research, and ideating. If you're open to incorporating it, HiClarity would welcome the opportunity. If you'd prefer a more traditional approach, we are comfortable with that too.

What You Can Expect

When you co-create strategy with stakeholders, you emerge with strategic direction grounded in what they actually need, genuine ownership across diverse groups, and a clear understanding of what implementation will require.

Next Steps

Contact Hi at hihoward@hiclarityfacilitation.com to discuss your strategic planning needs. In the meantime, feel free to learn more about [our strategic planning process](#).