

Key Takeaways

- Continuing an existing initiative is a decision and deserves the same scrutiny as beginning something new.
- Re-evaluate priorities against what the institution knows and needs today rather than giving old plans permanent loyalty.
- Shorten the priority list when necessary so the work that matters most has enough capacity and attention to succeed.

Estimated Reading Time: 4 minutes

Some priorities earn their place on next year's agenda.

Others simply inherit it.

As colleges and universities look toward the coming year, unfinished projects, longstanding technology needs, departmental requests, compliance requirements, deferred improvements, and new opportunities all compete for attention.

The result can be an impressive list.

It can also be an impossible one.

The challenge for institutional leaders is not simply deciding what to add for 2027. It is deciding what deserves to remain.

Continuation Is a Decision

Once an initiative has received time, money, or organizational attention, stopping or changing it can become difficult.

There's already an investment. People have worked on it. Expectations have formed. Perhaps the project appears in a strategic plan or has survived several budget cycles.

Continuing can begin to feel like the neutral choice.

It isn't.

Every initiative carried forward consumes some combination of funding, staff capacity, leadership attention, technical resources, and organizational patience. Continuing something therefore deserves the same scrutiny as beginning something new.

The question should not be, ***"Have we already invested in this?"***

It should be, ***"Knowing what we know today, would we choose this again?"***

Some Priorities Have Expiration Dates

Higher education operates in an environment where needs can change faster than institutional plans.

Enrollment patterns shift. Student expectations evolve. Security requirements increase. Vendors change.

Technology advances. Staffing pressures expose new weaknesses. Budget realities alter what is practical.

A priority established twelve or 18 months ago may have been exactly right at the time.

That does not guarantee that it remains right today.

This is especially important with technology initiatives, where organizations can become committed to completing a predetermined solution even after the underlying need has changed.

Leadership doesn't owe an old plan ***permanent loyalty***.

It owes the institution the best decision ***available now***.

Make Room by Making Choices

Prioritization is often described as ranking everything on the list.

Sometimes the better approach is shortening the list.

What can be completed and closed?

What can be consolidated with another initiative?

What should be redesigned because the original approach no longer fits?

What can wait without creating meaningful risk?

And what should just stop?

Those decisions can be uncomfortable. They can also release resources and attention for work that matters more.

An institution with fewer priorities is not necessarily doing less.

It may finally have enough capacity to accomplish more.

Protect the Work That Matters

The purpose of eliminating or postponing lower-value work is not austerity for its own sake.

It's focus.

When too many initiatives compete simultaneously, the most important ones do not automatically receive the attention they deserve. They compete for the same people, budgets, approvals, meetings, implementation windows, and executive attention as everything else.

That competition creates delay.

Choosing what will not move forward can therefore be one of the most practical ways to protect what must.

Looking ahead, the strongest portfolio may not be the one containing the greatest number of initiatives.

It may be the one in which leadership can clearly explain why every remaining initiative deserves to be there.

Closing Thought

A new planning year offers something valuable: permission to reconsider.

Use it.

Do not allow every unfinished project, inherited assumption, or familiar priority to cross automatically from December into January.

Examine each one against what the institution needs now, what it can realistically accomplish, and what consequences follow from acting — or not acting.

Some initiatives will easily earn another year.

Others may need to change.

A few may have reached the end of their useful life.

Finish strong in 2026 by deciding what deserves to come with you to 2027.

Start the Conversation

- Every successful modernization initiative begins with a shared understanding of where you are today and where you want to go next.
- If your leadership team is evaluating modernization priorities, Anchor Bridge Innovations would welcome the opportunity to start that conversation.