**­­­Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Risks (SOAR) Model**

The SOAR framework helps to build on the unit’s strengths, capitalize on the opportunities, identify innovative practices and aspirations, and anticipate the risks. It includes both information related to the unit’s internal and external environment. The questions in the SOAR template may facilitate and provoke an insightful discussion.

IEA is available to facilitate the environmental scan session. This worksheet may assist you in reflecting on the external and internal environment in preparation for the session.

**Step-by-step Guide**

**Individual Reflection:**

Consider the questions in each SOAR section on page 2 and record your answers in the template on page 3. To see the possible connections, pair the sections of SOAR as shown in the template and record the ideas in the appropriate area.

**In a group:**

For each SOAR section identify common 5-6 priorities. Use the affinity diagram on page 4 to group prioritized ideas by themes, creating clusters of similar ideas. These themes may help the unit identify goals for a strategic plan.

**Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Risks (SOAR) Questions**

**Strengths**

* What are the department’s greatest accomplishments in the last two years?
* What makes you unique?
* What do you as a department excel at?
* How do you use your strengths to get results?
* How do your strengths fit the realities of the market?
* Where are you making money?
* What do you provide that is world class for students, the employees, the community, the country, the world?

**Aspirations**

* What do you want to achieve in the future?
* What should your department look like in the future?
* What are the faculty and the students passionate about?
* As a department, what difference do you hope to make to students, the institution, the community, the industry?
* What processes or strategies would support your aspirations?

**Risks**

* What challenges in the market will demand extra effort and resources?
* What resources will you need to perform changes? Where is it possible to gain these resources?
* How many other institutions can offer similar products and services?
* What obstacles might there be in the external and internal environments?

**Opportunities**

* What changes and trends in the market align with the department’s strengths?
* What gaps in the market could you fill?
* How can you reframe challenges to be seen as opportunities?
* What can you do better?
* How can you best meet the needs of your stakeholders?
* How can you distinctively differentiate yourself from other institutions?

**Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Risks (SOAR) Template**

**Strengths**

**Aspirations**

**Risks**

**Opportunities**

**Use strengths to maximize opportunities**

**Minimize risks with strengths**

**Anticipate risks to achieve aspirations**

**Use opportunities to fulfil aspirations**

Affinity Diagram

The Affinity Diagram helps to group ideas generated during the strengths, opportunities, aspirations and risks (SOAR) analysis by themes. Similar ideas are arranged into columns and named accordingly.

Theme 1

Theme 2

Theme 3

Theme 4

Theme 5