

The Strategic Decision Framework

A two-level decision framework for navigating budget cuts, staffing reductions, and program prioritization in career services.

DESIGNED BY

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01

The Capacity Lens: Effort × Reach

Before you can decide what to cut, you need to see where the pressure is building. This first framework maps your programs across two dimensions that reveal capacity strain.

IN THIS SECTION

- 1 Defining Reach & Effort for your context
- 2 The 2x2 Capacity Matrix explained
- 3 Mapping your programs and services
- 4 Reading the pattern: where is your portfolio imbalanced?

Understanding Reach & Effort

As we think about scale, two dimensions matter most: how broadly your services reach students, and how much staff effort is required to sustain them at current quality.

Defining Reach

Reach is how broadly access is distributed in a particular cycle. That cycle could be a term, a semester, a summer, a year, or even three years — whatever you determine it to be. Depth matters, but this lens is specifically about breadth, because breadth is what institutions are increasingly asking for.

Defining Effort

Effort is the ongoing staff time, coordination, customization, and invisible work required to sustain something at its current quality. Low-effort work is repeatable, not person-dependent, and resilient to staffing changes. High-effort work requires ongoing coordination, special handling, or depends on a few key people.

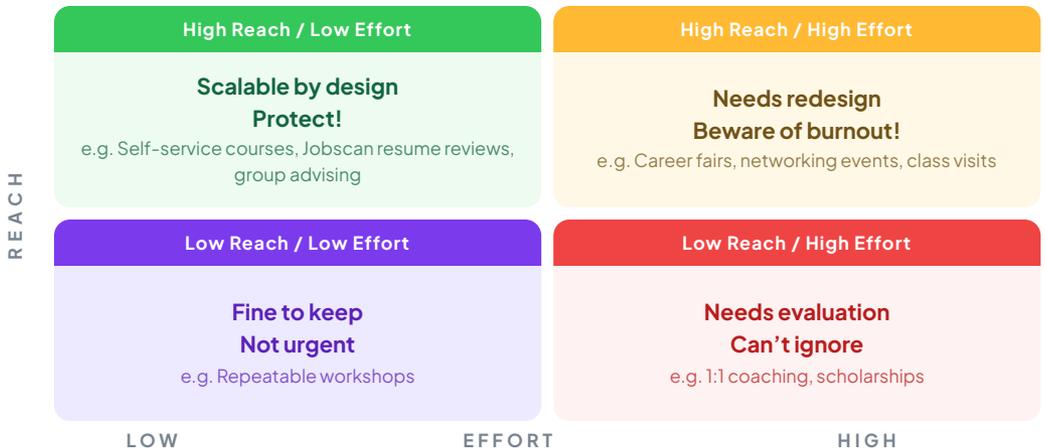
KEY INSIGHT

If someone left your team tomorrow, would this program bottom out? If the answer is yes, that's a signal about effort dependency worth paying attention to.

Reach / Effort Matrix

Reach: How broadly access is distributed in a typical cycle

Effort: Ongoing staff time, coordination, customization, emotional labor



PRO TIP

If a large share of your work clusters in the high-effort columns, that's a signal your portfolio is out of balance — especially when staff are being cut but reach expectations are not.

Importance / Sustainability Matrix

Strategic Importance: Does your campus see this as important enough to resource and defend, not just endorse?

Sustainability: Can this continue at its current quality without extraordinary effort, exceptions, or fragility?



KEY INSIGHT

The question is whether the institution is willing to sustain it right now, in our current fiscal environment. Endorsing something is not the same as resourcing it.

How to Map Your Programs

1

List all programs and services

Write out every program, service, and recurring initiative your team delivers. Include everything from 1:1 coaching to workshops, treks, mentoring programs, and tech-enabled services.

2

Assess reach for each

For each item, estimate how many students it touches in a typical cycle. Be honest about whether reach is by design or by accident.

3

Assess effort for each

Consider: how much ongoing staff time, coordination, and customization does this require? Would it survive a staffing change?

4

Plot on the matrix

Place each program into the appropriate quadrant. Look for clustering patterns — especially in the high-effort columns.

5

Identify your red-zone items

Focus on high-effort, low-reach items first. These are where hard conversations and decisions can no longer be deferred.

Callout Box Treatments

KEY INSIGHT

This is an insight callout — used for data points, key findings, or important takeaways that readers should remember.

FROM THE WEBINAR

“The question is whether the institution is willing to sustain it right now, in our current fiscal environment.”

— Rebekah Paré

PRO TIP

This is a pro tip callout — used for practical advice, best practices, or actionable recommendations.

WATCH OUT

This is a warning callout — used for common pitfalls, mistakes to avoid, or important caveats.

Resources & Links

The following tools and resources were referenced during the webinar.

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Strategic Ownership Matrices (Canva)

Rebekah's Effort x Reach and Importance x Sustainability frameworks.

canva.com/design/DAHBCptTXU0/...

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