

# Discern Campus Strategy

## Understanding Discernment

### What Does It Mean to Discern Campus Strategy?

Discernment means paying attention to what God is already doing on your campus and joining him in it. Our perspective and capacity are limited, so we need God's guidance to lead wisely and strategically.

### Why Discerning Should be Done Communally

Five reasons to discern in community:

1. You are a limited human who can't see or imagine all of your strategic options.
2. You have a history that might twist your perspective.
3. You have both strengths and a sinful nature that can distort your judgment.
4. God promises a special experience of his presence when we gather for ministry.
5. Your ministry will need to loop in other people — bringing them in early can help with buy-in!

### Healthy and Unhealthy Cultures of Discernment

A healthy culture of discernment shapes how people experience your ministry — and even how they experience you as a leader.

In a healthy culture...	In an unhealthy culture...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take time to learn and uncover the needs and opportunities of the campus</li> <li>2. Praying before and while planning</li> <li>3. Reliance on God's Spirit for guidance</li> <li>4. Thoughtfully creating a plan but being flexible</li> <li>5. Staff, students, faculty, and volunteers all shape the plans and decisions together</li> <li>6. Zooming out to have thoughtful communal discernment around what rhythms should start, stop, and continue</li> <li>7. Plans originate from an encounter with God</li> <li>8. At an impasse, students make the final call, building ownership</li> <li>9. Wisely involve your community in stewarding all the resources around your ministry</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assumes that we know what's best for a campus</li> <li>2. Planning without praying as a purely intellectual activity</li> <li>3. Over-reliance on strategy</li> <li>4. Under-reliance on strategy</li> <li>5. Staff make all the decisions and plans unilaterally</li> <li>6. Week to week survival mode to just execute what's been done before</li> <li>7. Plans originate from personal or organizational agendas</li> <li>8. At an impasse, staff makes the final call</li> <li>9. Ignore or squander the resources that God's entrusted to you</li> </ol>

## Vision and Assess

### Clarify Your Vision First

Vision is "a clear mental picture of what could be, fueled by the conviction that it should be." It gives your ministry direction, focus, and endurance — it's a picture of what God might want to do on your campus.

#### PRO TIP

Don't waste time crafting a perfect vision statement. Instead, pray and talk together about InterVarsity's vision: transform, renew, develop.

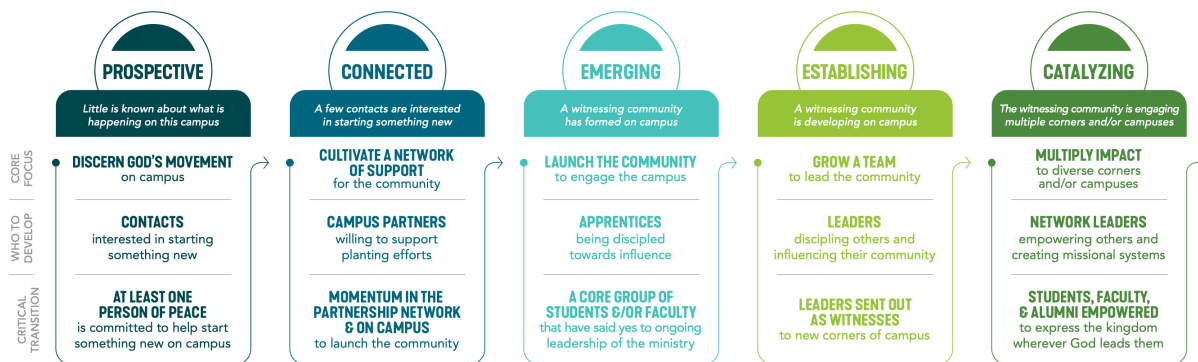
### Recognize Your Context

Your ministry doesn't happen in a vacuum — you need to understand your campus's unique context, community, and history. Copying a strategy from somewhere else without adapting it can backfire. Pay attention, pray, and tailor your approach with your team.

## Campus Continuum

The Campus Continuum helps you assess where your ministry is and decide what's next, offering stages, core focuses, key leadership moves, and more.

Every stage — even the small beginnings — is valuable and part of God's good work. Match your activities to your stage and trust God to bless it.



## Assess Reality

Use the [worksheet](#) with the [Standard Version of the Campus Continuum](#) to assess reality by reflecting on your ministry and where you are on the Campus Continuum.

## Decide and Do

### Make a Decision

Take a look at the Campus Continuum and the activities or structures you listed when you assessed reality earlier. Decide what to start, stop, and continue — including activities and structures, and people you will focus on. Remember, discernment isn't about perfection; it's a Spirit-led process. Make a plan, hold it loosely, and let Jesus adjust your course as needed.

## The Spirituality of Numbers and Goals

Numbers and goals are tools — not trophies. They help us care for people, spot gaps, and fuel holy ambition, but our value comes from Jesus, not results.

## Structural Architecture

Healthy ministry strategy requires structures that match your vision, context, and stage — that's how strategy turns into action. Every "how" involves a "who." Lock in the details by asking:

1. How will you structure your programs and activities?
2. Who is going to "own" each element of the strategy?

## Training

Every ministry plan will reveal areas where you and your team still need to grow — that's normal. Training is part of the process, not a problem. You don't have to train alone. Share the load by using tools like the Ministry Playbook, tapping into partners' strengths, and leveraging wider InterVarsity training opportunities.

## Case Studies

Check out the course's case studies that show how to put your strategy into action.

## Barriers

### Trust vs. Planning

In ministry, we face two temptations: strategy without mystery and mystery without strategy. Healthy ministry is both high mystery and high strategy. We plan in partnership with the Spirit, not in place of him. Strategy is unavoidable. The only question is whether it's wise, prayerful, and Spirit-led.

### Failure

Failure doesn't define you — Jesus does. When strategy breaks down, it's an opportunity to learn, not a sign of defeat. Two things you can do when it does: fix or pivot, and lock in your learning through debriefing regularly.

### Disagreements

Disagreement is a gift — it's a chance to love, listen, and discern together with honor and humility. Defer wisely to students and faculty. Empower local leadership to shape the ministry in their context.

### Apathy

We don't just develop strategy, we develop people. Inviting your team into the process is part of their discipleship. If your team isn't ready yet, keep praying and mentoring. God meets us in the waiting — you're not alone.

## Course Worksheet

- [Discern Campus Strategy Debrief Guide](#)
- [Discern Campus Strategy Assessment](#)
- [Campus Continuum Reflection Guide](#)

## Related Resources

- [The Campus Continuum](#)
- [The Five Thresholds](#)
- [The Big Story Gospel Summary](#)
- [Reviving Mission by Linson Daniel, Jon Hietbrink, and Eric Rafferty](#) (book)
- [Vioneering by Andy Stanley](#) (book)
- [True Story by James Choung](#) (book)
- [Longing for Revival by James Choung and Ryan Pfeiffer](#) (book)
- [Eric Rafferty at Ambition 25](#) (video)

## Recommended Courses

- [Establishing Rhythms for Ministry & Revival](#)
- [Raise Up Leaders](#)

Visit the Ministry Playbook to learn more about leading, planting, and building Kingdom movements on college campuses: <https://www.theministryplaybook.com/>