

Creating a shared direction for distributed academic family medicine



Developing a shared direction for the future through multi-year strategic plans required effective engagement to understand diverse perspectives and identify and align on priorities.

Sector:
Academic Healthcare

Primary service:
Strategic Planning

Client:
**Department of Family Medicine,
Dalhousie University**

Project:
**Strategic Planning for the
Department of Family Medicine**

10

**Teaching sites across the three
Maritime provinces**

150+

**People engaged to provide
input on the strategic plan**



The situation:

Dalhousie University's Department of Family Medicine (DFM) is a large, distributed academic medicine department with 11 programs spanning 10 teaching sites across Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. As DFM prepares for continued growth in family medicine, it needed a strategic plan that could align clinical care, education, and research priorities while reflecting the diverse needs of faculty, learners, and partners, as well as healthcare needs and priorities across three provinces. Developing a shared direction required meaningful engagement, evidence-informed decision-making, and consensus-building across a large and geographically distributed organization to help DFM advance its vision of "Healthy communities through excellence in distributed Academic Family Medicine."

Complexities

- Distributed academic department operating across three provinces and 10 teaching sites
- Balancing priorities related to education, research, clinical care, and workforce development
- Building consensus and alignment through an iterative engagement and planning process



The approach:

RPI worked closely with DFM to design and implement **a structured, phased planning methodology** to develop DFM's 2018-2023 and 2024-2029 strategic plans. The methodology combined engagement, evidence review, facilitated decision-making, and validation. This approach was designed to build broad ownership of the plan while ensuring strategic priorities were grounded in evidence and organizational realities.

To develop the 2024-2029 plan, RPI conducted the following key activities:

- Facilitated six **planning sessions** with a small group of faculty and staff leading the strategic planning work, using structured processes to support alignment, prioritization, and decision-making.
- Conducted **environmental scans and document reviews** to incorporate evidence and leading practices into strategy development.
- Led **engagement** to inform planning through 10 consultations sessions with DFM staff, learners, and faculty, and over 30 interviews with external partners and interest holders across the Maritimes to inform the draft strategic plan.
- Applied **rigorous analysis and synthesis** methods to integrate engagement findings, evidence, and leading practices into clear, focused, and actionable strategic directions in the draft strategic plan.
- Implemented iterative **validation** using a survey and facilitated sessions to ensure feasibility and buy-in before creating the final plan.
- Supported **operational planning and implementation** of the Plan.



The impact:

The strategic planning process supported DFM to create a shared vision and priorities across its distributed network of programs, faculty, staff, learners, and partners. The resulting Strategic Plans established clear strategic directions, measurable objectives, and a plan for implementation with accountabilities and timelines. By integrating strategic priorities into ongoing operations, DFM strengthened organizational alignment and created a practical roadmap for decision-making and advancing its education, research, and clinical care mandates over the long term.



"RPI's comprehensive planning process helped us develop a clear and actionable 2024-2029 strategic plan. Their skill in gathering insights, facilitating collaboration and engagement, and turning information into meaningful goals and actions was invaluable."

Dr. Katherine Stringer, Department Head, Department of Family Medicine



The project team:



Clare Levin
Partner



Stephanie Heath
Strategic Advisor



About RPI

RPI helps organizations find and identify insights to support decision-making and drive evidence-backed change. The RPI team brings extensive experience in the areas of health, accessibility, education, community services, and other public sector services.

Organizations come to RPI for support when:

- They need credible evidence to support decision-making, especially around funding or program/policy change
- They need help setting direction, planning for, and navigating complex policy, implementation, and system-level changes
- They need support hearing and making sense of diverse perspectives to inform implementation and next steps

Reach out to talk about how RPI can help you.

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