

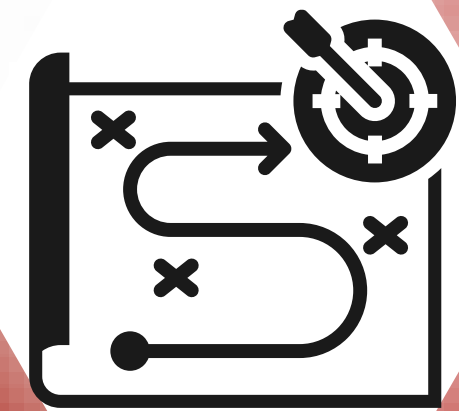
THINKING STRATEGICALLY

Description: This session focuses on strategic proposal development, guiding participants to align project ideas with institutional priorities, funder expectations, and community needs to create clear, compelling, and supportable proposals.

Presented by:

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Dr. Valerie Barko, Kaua'i County Administrator, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR)

Date: May 30th, 2026



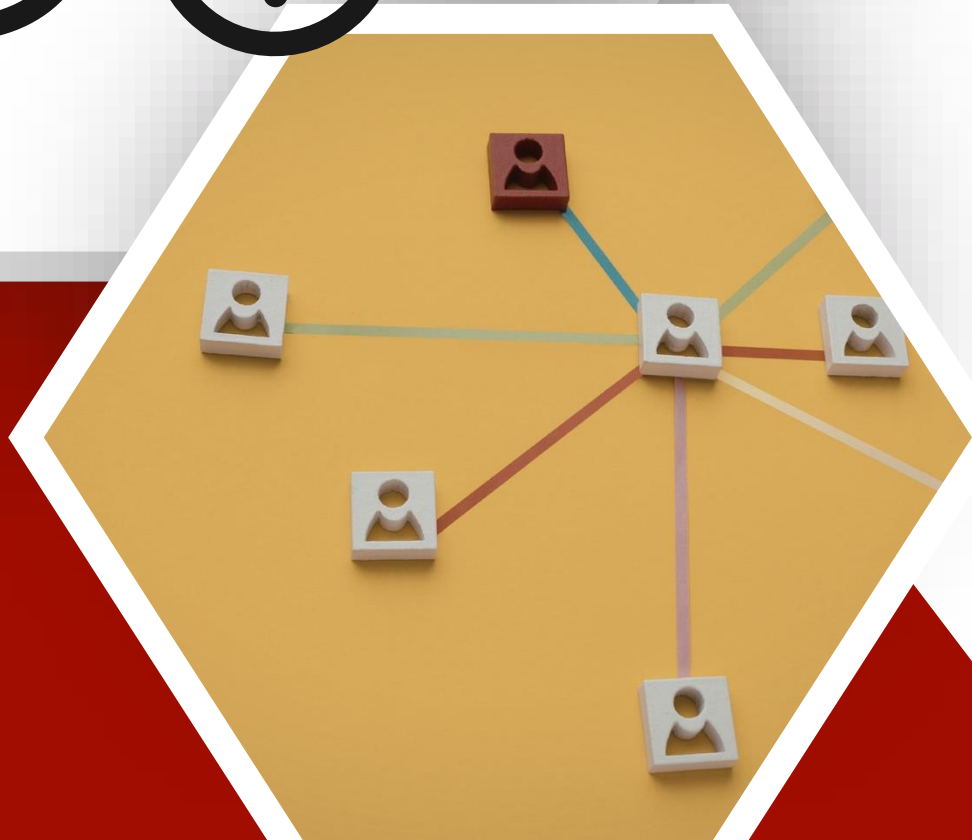
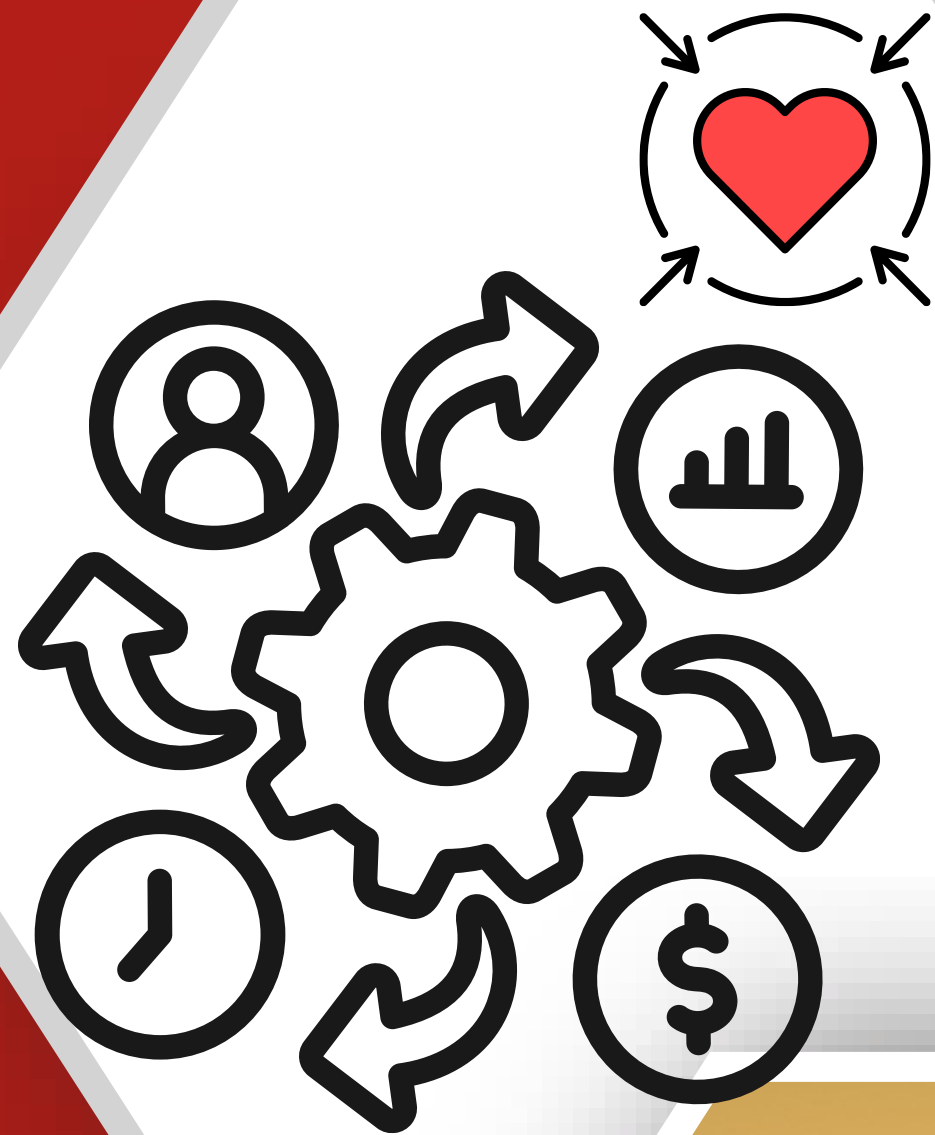
UNITED TRIBES
TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Why Thinking Strategically Matters

- Strong proposals are not standalone ideas.
- **Strong proposals demonstrate:**
 - alignment with institutional priorities;
 - Responsiveness to community and workforce needs; and
 - Fit with funder priorities (NSF/TCUP)
- **Weak proposals often:**
 - Sit outside institutional direction;
 - Duplicate or compete with existing efforts; and
 - Lack clear justification.



What Strategic Thinking Really Means



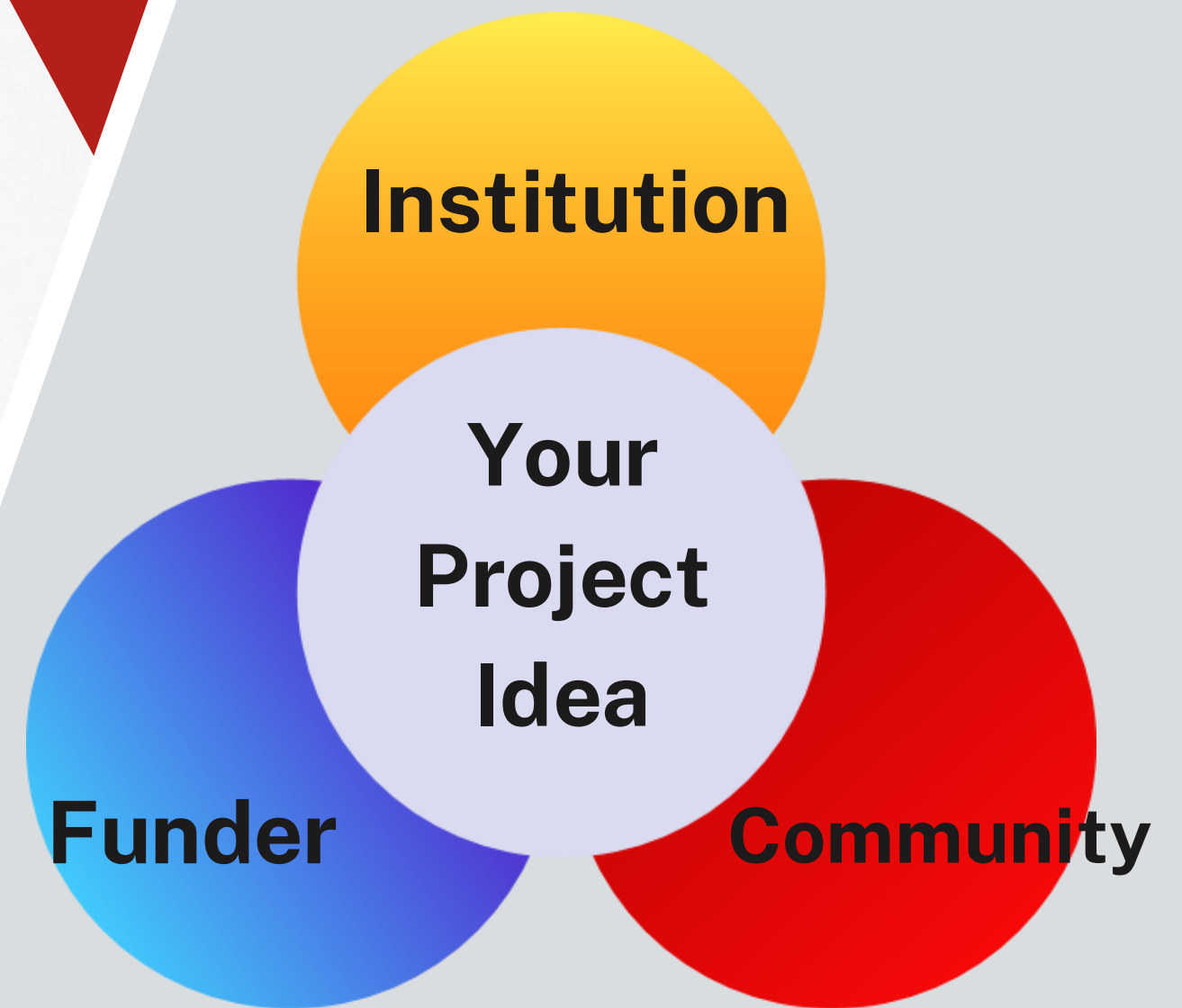
- **Alignment:** Does this matter to your institution?
- **Context:** What realities shape your project?
- **Linkages:** Can you connect activities to outcomes clearly?

Alignment Framework

Project = your idea.

Proposal = aligned, strategic case for support

Your proposal is how you strategically position that idea at the intersection of institutional priorities, funder expectations, and community needs so that it is compelling, credible, and fundable.



Reflection: What Did You Find?

Refer to Part 2 of your homework.

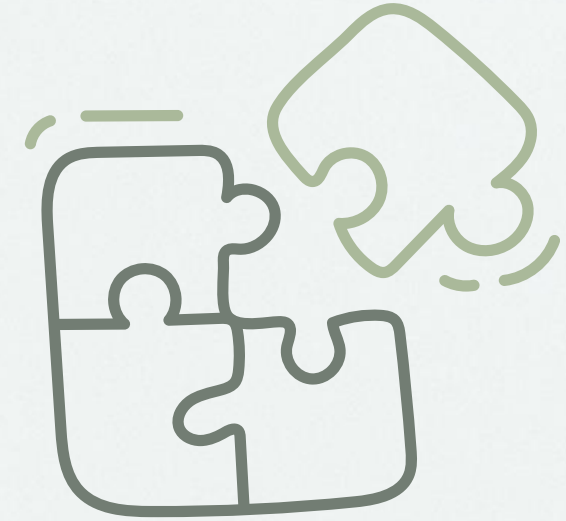
- **What were 2-3 priorities you identified?**
- **What language showed up repeatedly?**
- **For what metrics is your institution accountable?**

Discuss with the person next to you (2 minutes total time)

Why Institutional Language Matters

Reviewers look for:

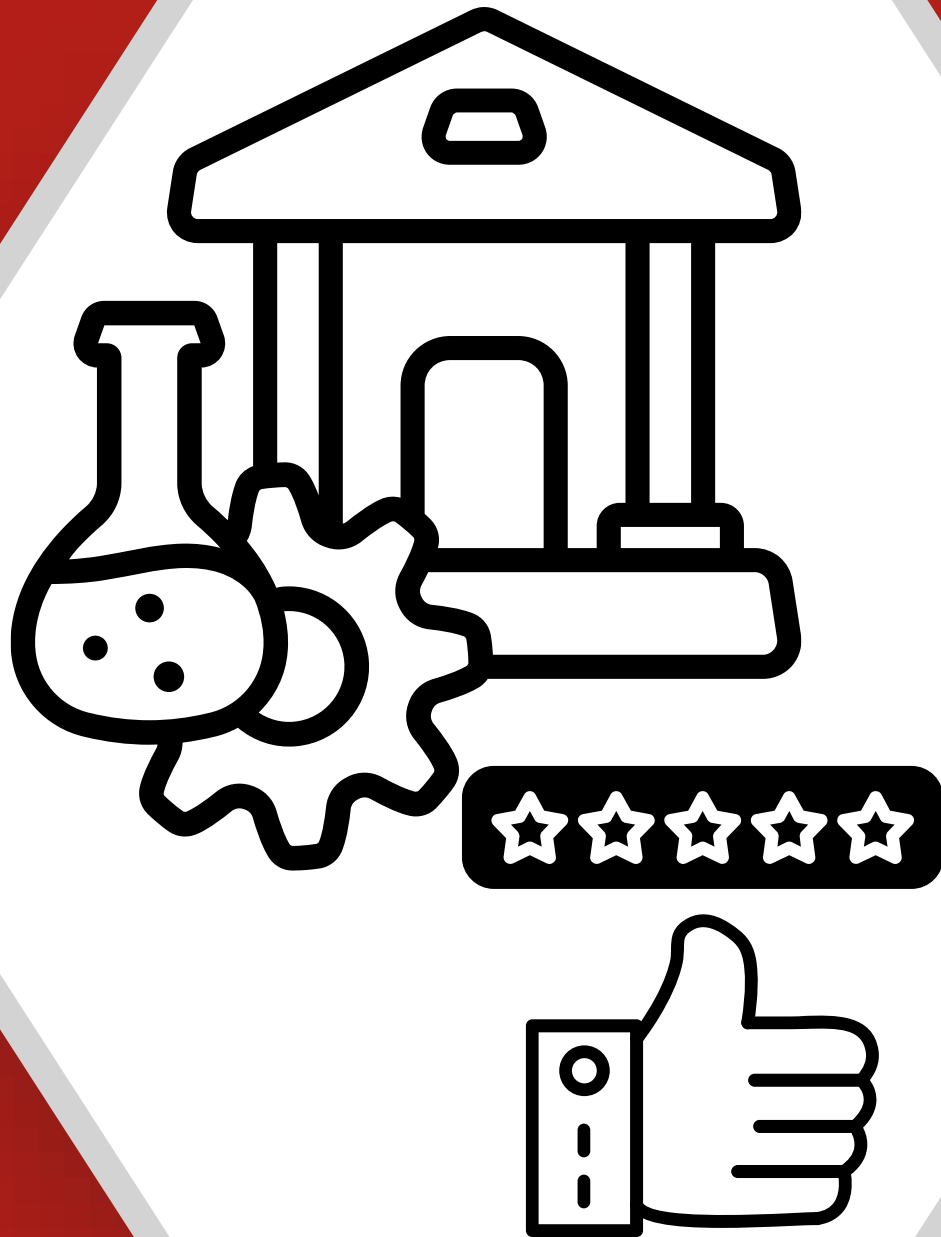
- Institutional fit
- Evidence of need
- Feasibility



Using institutional language:

- Signals alignment
- Shows credibility
- Makes your proposal easier to support

Example phrases: “student persistence,”
“STEM workforce pipeline,”
“transfer pathways”



From Priority to Proposal



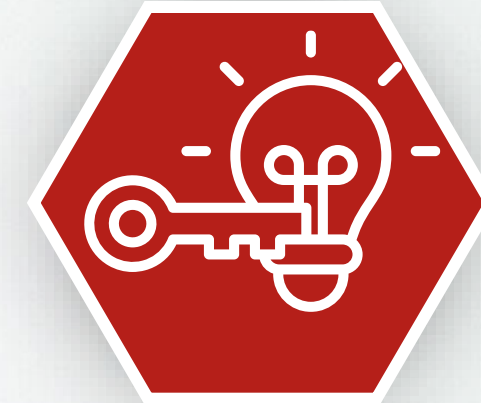
Weak:

We want to create a STEM mentoring program.



Strategic:

This project advances the college's priority to improve STEM retention by implementing structured mentoring aligned with first-year student success initiatives.



Key Takeaway:

Same idea.
Completely different strength.

Reflection: Your Opportunity Mapping

Refer to your Part 3 of your homework.

- **To which institutional priority did your idea connect?**
- **Where does your idea fit strongest?**

Discuss with the same person next to you (2 minutes total time)

Finding the Gaps & Opportunities



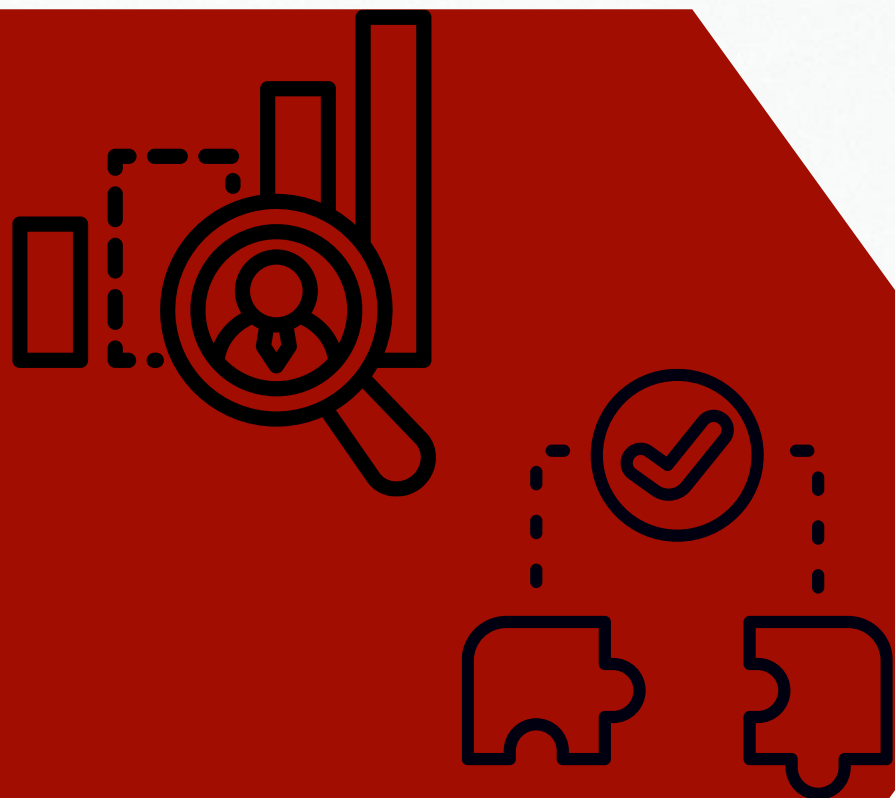
Strong proposals do not simply align, they also:

- Fill gaps;
- Address unmet needs; and
- Help institutions meet those metrics with which they are struggling.

Refer to Part 5 of your homework.

Where is your institution not yet achieving what it says it wants to achieve?

Discuss with the same person next to you (2 minutes total time)



The Strategic Anchor

Refer to Part 6 of your homework.

Which institutional priority would make your project impossible to ignore?

An example strategic anchor template is provided in your homework document.

Discuss with the same person next to you (2 minutes total time)



Refine Your Strategic Anchor

Example template:

This project advances **[priority]** by **[activity]**, addressing **[gap]**, and improving **[metric/outcome]**.

Share with your discussion partner for input to improve or affirm you have developed a good strategic anchor.



Essential Takeaways

Strategic Proposals

**Align with
institutional
priorities**

**Use
institutional
language**

**Address
real gaps**

**Connect to
measurable
outcomes**

If your proposal does not clearly support what your institution already says matters, why would they support your proposal?





Transition-What Happens Next?

We have framed how to align your project strategically.:

What happens when you alignment is missing or incomplete?

In the next segment we will

- explore: What are the institutional consequences of misaligned proposals?
- How do funder priorities and expectations shape what actually gets supported?
- Why does community and workforce relevance matter beyond just a good idea?
- What are the REAL costs: financial, operational, and human, of getting this wrong?

Why Align...

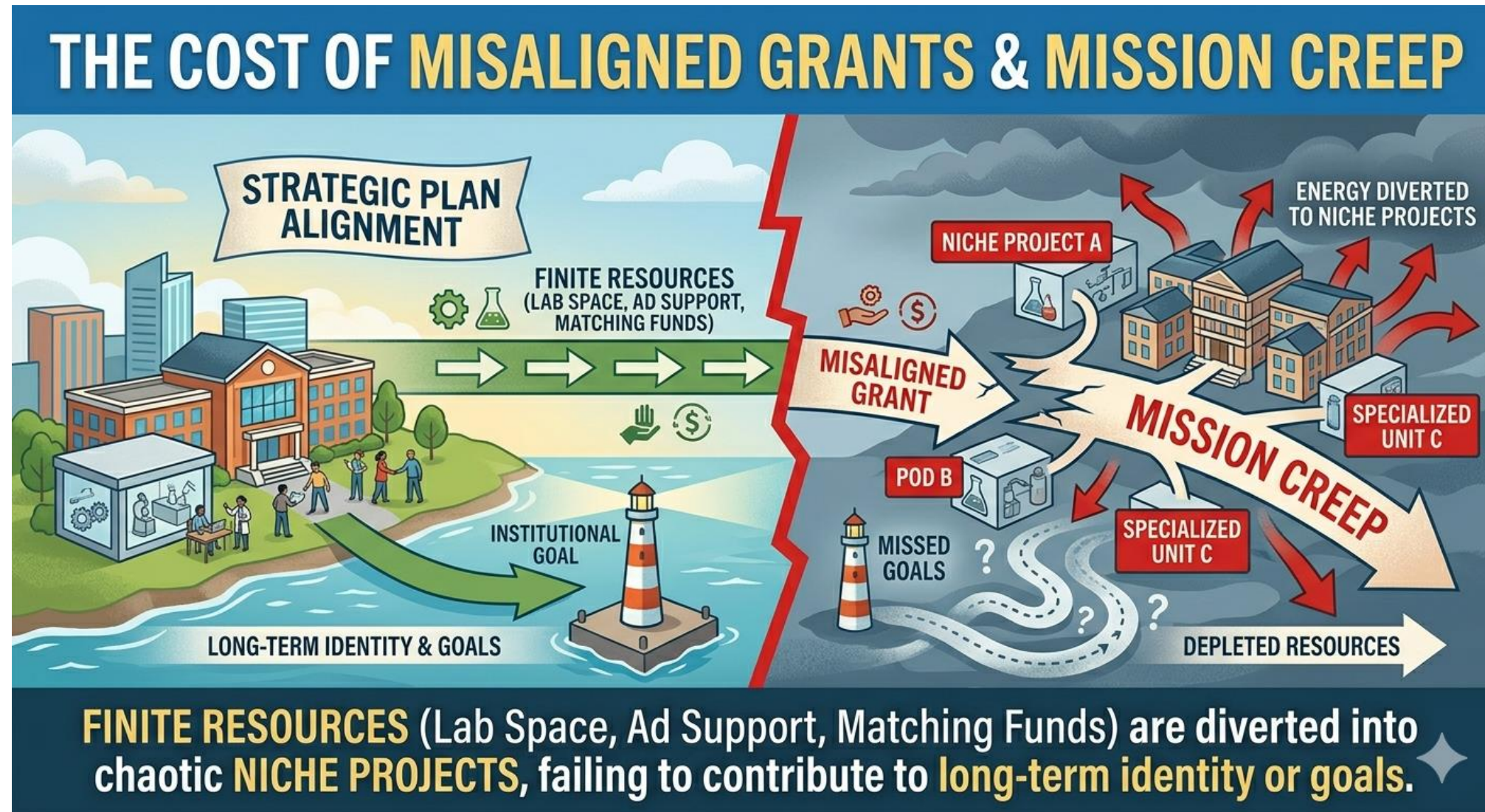


When a grant proposal and an institutional strategic plan aren't on the same page, it's a bit like trying to sail a ship in two directions at once. You might be moving, but you aren't getting where the organization needs to go.

What Misalignment Looks Like

- **Resource Misalignment and "Mission Creep"**
- **Financial Strain**
- **Administrative and Infrastructure Friction**
- **Dilution of Brand and Reputation**
- **Personnel Burnout**

Resource Misalignment and "Mission Creep"



Institutions have finite resources

Mission Creep - where the organization's energy is diverted into niche projects that don't contribute to its long-term identity or goals

Financial Strain



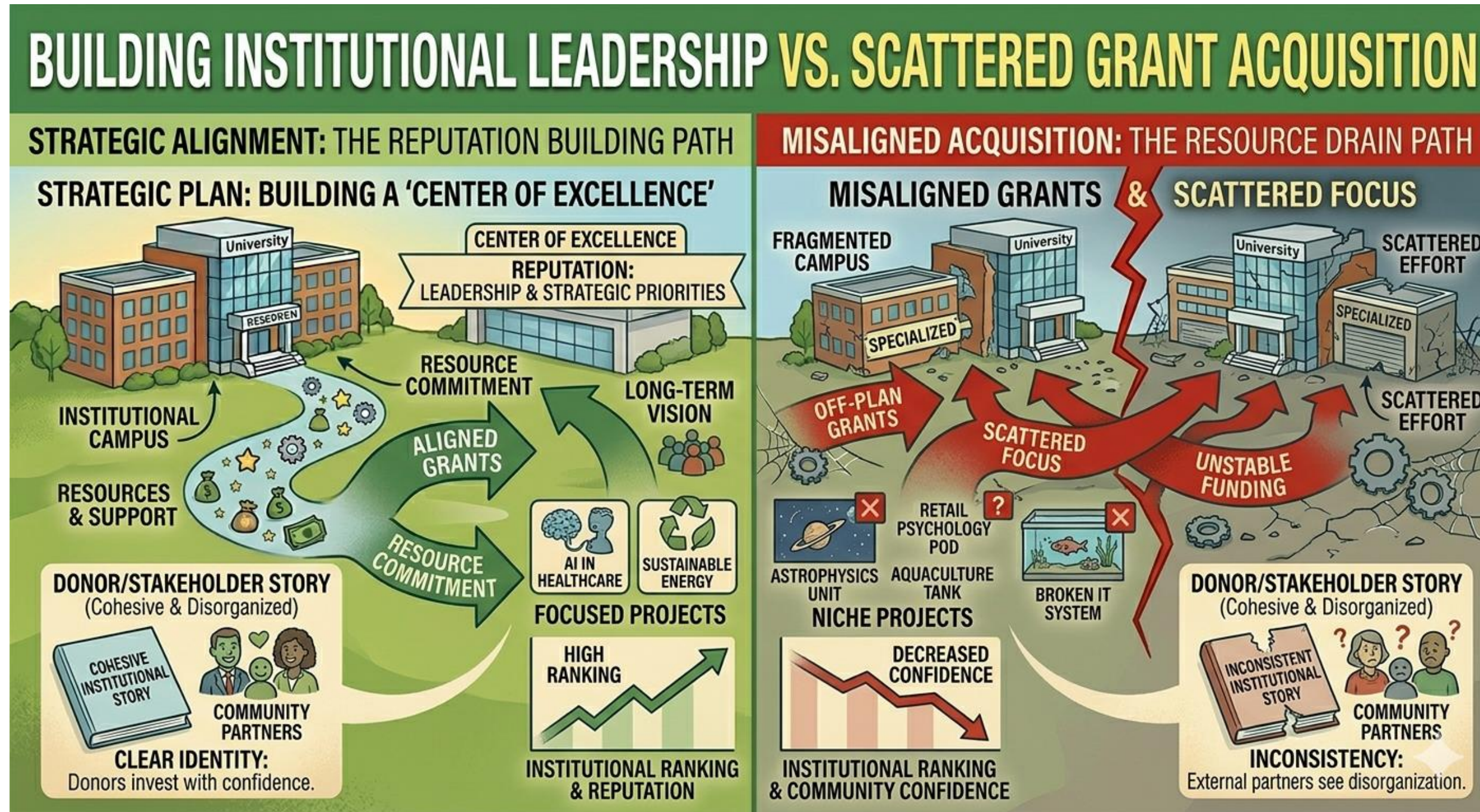
Hidden Costs

Sustainability Issues

“Zombie Projects”

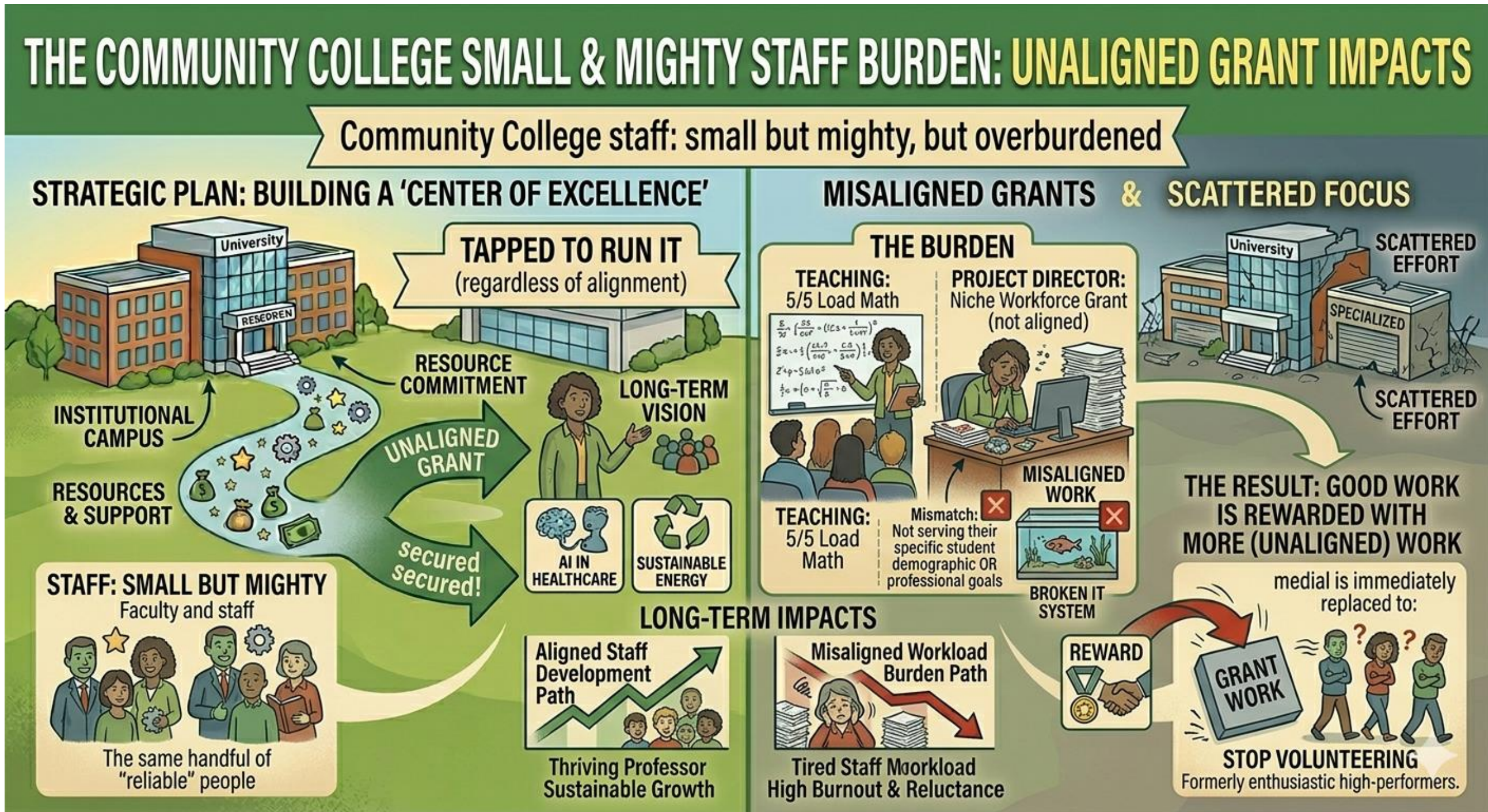


Dilution of Brand and Reputation



Scattered Focus
Community Confusion

Personnel Burnout

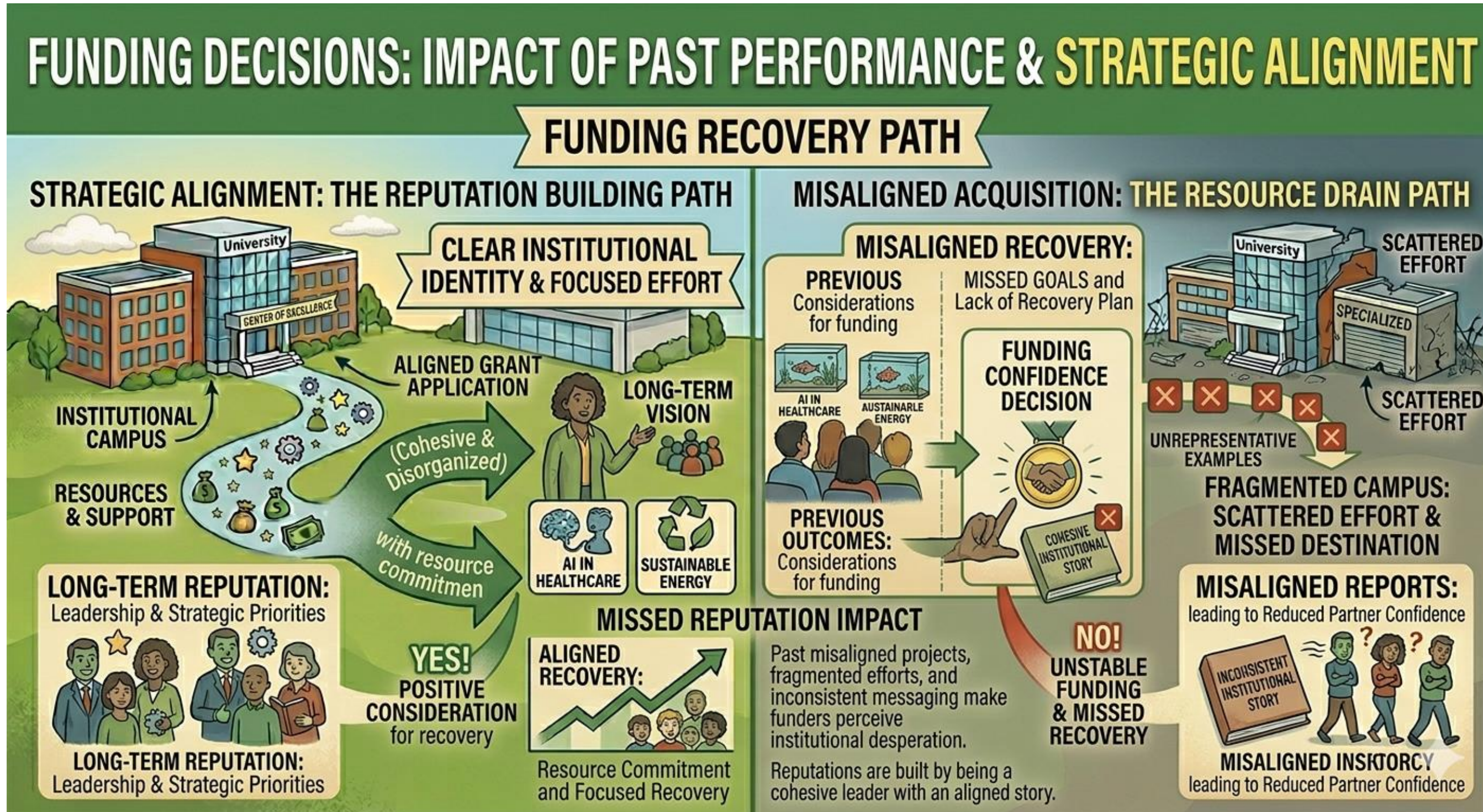


The Burden
The Result

Comparison of Burnout Drivers

Strategic Alignment	Misaligned/Off-Plan Work
"Good Stress" : Hard work that leads to student graduation and institutional praise.	"Bad Stress" : Hard work that feels like "checking boxes" for a funder.
Integration : Grant tasks overlap with existing teaching/advising duties.	Fragmentation : Grant tasks are "one more thing" on top of an 80-hour week.
Support : IT, HR, and Facilities are "all in" because the President cares.	Resistance : Every request feels like you are asking for a personal favor.

Funders Viewpoint



Annual Reports

Previous Grant Outcomes

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT ACTIVITY

PARTICIPANTS:

Faculty/Staff Team
Strategic Observers



ACTIVITY OBSERVATIONS



Strategic alignment is not just about strengthening your proposal – it directly impacts whether your project is supported, sustainable, and successful within your institution and beyond.

