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Entitled:

The Keys to Re-affirmation of Accreditation

And

Change of Mission to a Four-Year Degree Serving Institution

(Integrating AQIP

Into The

Strategic Planning Process)

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### Abstract

This article is designed to demonstrate how one institution successfully obtained its re-affirmation of accreditation and authorization for a “change of mission” from a two-year serving institution to a two-year and four-year degree serving institution by the Higher Learning Commission – all by integrating AQIP into its Strategic Planning Process. This presentation focuses on the development of an Institutional Strategic Plan which integrates the AQIP Systems Portfolio and Action Projects as critical elements within its overall design and implementation. The article employs numerous graphics, flow charts, and Gantt charts to demonstrate how our institution has integrated AQIP into the very fabric of our day to day operations and our strategic planning efforts towards continuous quality improvement.

The recommended audiences for this article are AQIP Institutional Trustees, Regents, Presidents, and senior administrators who are interested in learning how their institutions can successfully integrate AQIP into its Strategic Planning Process. Practitioners and students of AQIP will also find this presentation useful in enhancing their personal knowledge of AQIP processes in the higher educational setting.

Our institution’s integration of AQIP, Total Quality Management (TQM), and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) throughout our institution has and will continue to enhance our overall performance and provide the means by which we implement our strategic plans.



### **Narrative**

This article is designed to demonstrate how one institution successfully obtained its re-affirmation of accreditation and authorization for a “change of mission” from a two-year serving institution to a two-year and four-year degree serving institution by the Higher Learning Commission – all by integrating AQIP into its Strategic Planning Process. This presentation focuses on the development of an Institutional Strategic Plan which integrates the AQIP Systems Portfolio and Action Projects as critical elements within its overall design and implementation. The article employs numerous graphics, flow charts, and Gantt charts to demonstrate how our institution has integrated AQIP into the very fabric of our day to day operations and our strategic planning efforts towards continuous quality improvement.

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### **Institutional Overview**

Northern New Mexico College (NNMC) is a public four-year degree granting institution founded in 1909 by the New Mexico State Constitution. NNMC is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and is designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution by the U.S. Department of Education.

NNMC offers over 70 certificate, two-year and four-year degree programs. NNMC operates from two campuses in Espanola and El Rito, New Mexico. Each of these campuses occupies unique roles that are continually evolving. NNMC’s serves over 2000 students, with an operating budget of \$32M annually. NNMC is delighted to be an AQIP Institution of Higher Learning.

### **AQIP/TQM/CQI Integration**



One of the most significant transformations that have occurred at NNMC in the recent past is the result of implementing quality processes into the fabric of the college. The college has designated its status as an AQIP Institution of Higher Learning which includes the integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) and the adaptation of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) institution-wide. Unlike many institutions who have only partially adopted AQIP, or who have introduced AQIP in an incremental fashion, NNMC has wholeheartedly adopted AQIP/TQM/CQI as the way it conducts business - from strategic planning to execution of its day-to-day operations.

### **Process Improvement**

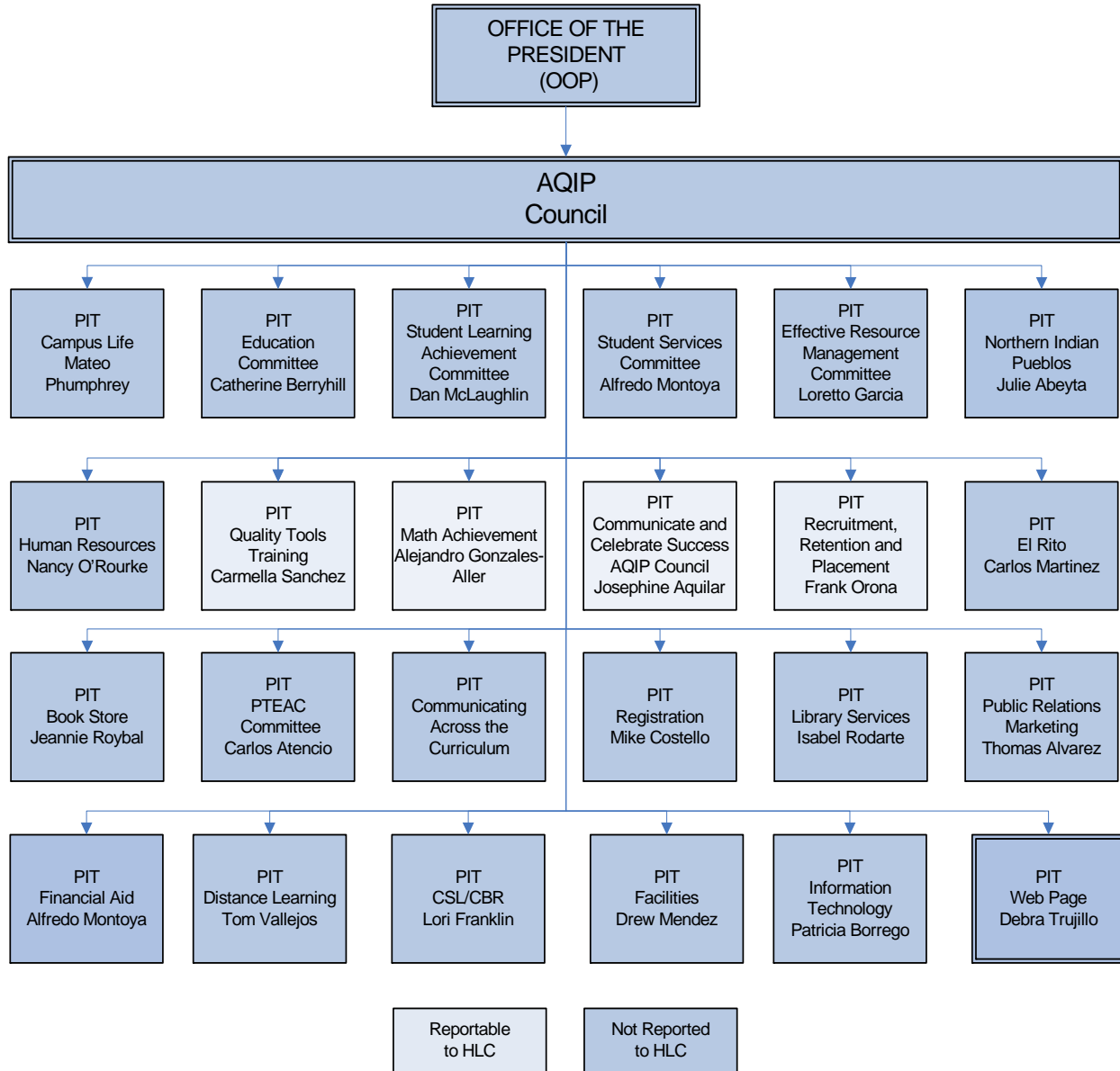
Integral to the institutions' integration of AQIP/TQM/CQI, is the implementation of a means to assure the institutions' continual focus on continuous improvement. At NNMC this has been accomplished through the implementation of Process Improvement Teams (PITs). PIT's employ Quality Tools and Process Improvement Methodology in their implementation to assure that their "recommendations for improvement" are credible and reliable. PIT's are formed in three different ways; 1) by designation and appointment by the Office of the President; 2) by assignment from an annual strategic planning forum; and, 3) by PIT self nomination and acceptance by the Office of the President.

### **AQIP Committee Structure**

At NNMC, all committees belong to one of four AQIP Committee types that are functionally and procedurally aligned with one another. The 5 senior administrators of the institution comprise the Office of the President (OOP); reporting to the OOP is the AQIP Council composed of all Chairs, Deans, Directors, Provost, all administrative personnel of the institution; and all PIT Chairpersons. This rather large organization makes all decisions regarding PIT team recommendations and budgetary recommendations to the OOP. But the most powerful of the committees are the 20+ Process Improvement Teams, who, utilizing quality tools, prioritize "Opportunities for Improvement," and the solutions to these opportunities. These recommendations constitute the bulk of incremental budgetary recommendations for the institution.



Following is NNMC's AQIP Committee Organization Chart including all Process Improvement Teams:

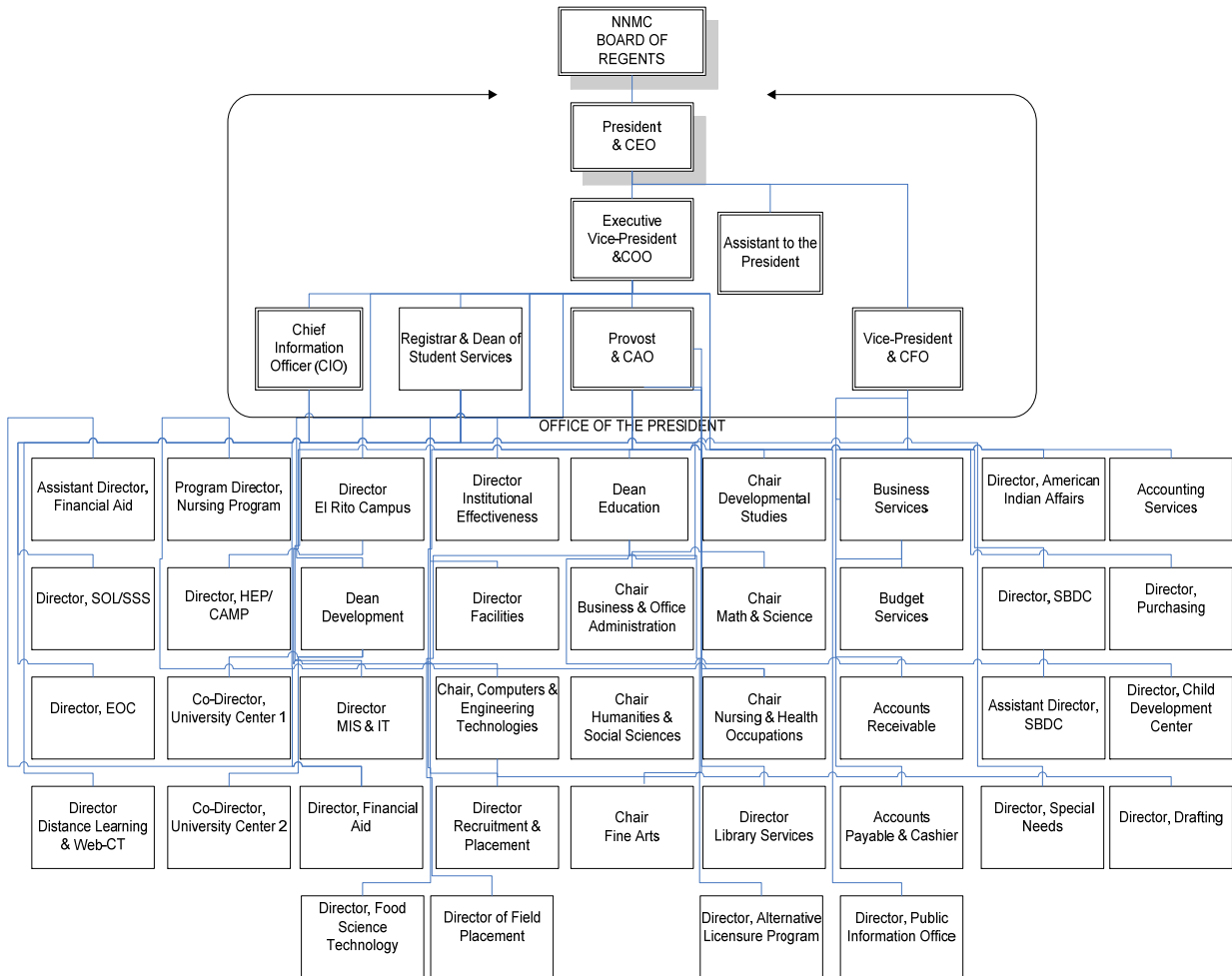


**Management Organization Structure**



NNMC’s organization structure looks very similar to most other institutions of higher learning. This more traditional structure allows for effective fiscal, budgetary and performance accountability for all employees within the institution. NNMC’s Organization Structure is as follows:

## MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION CHART

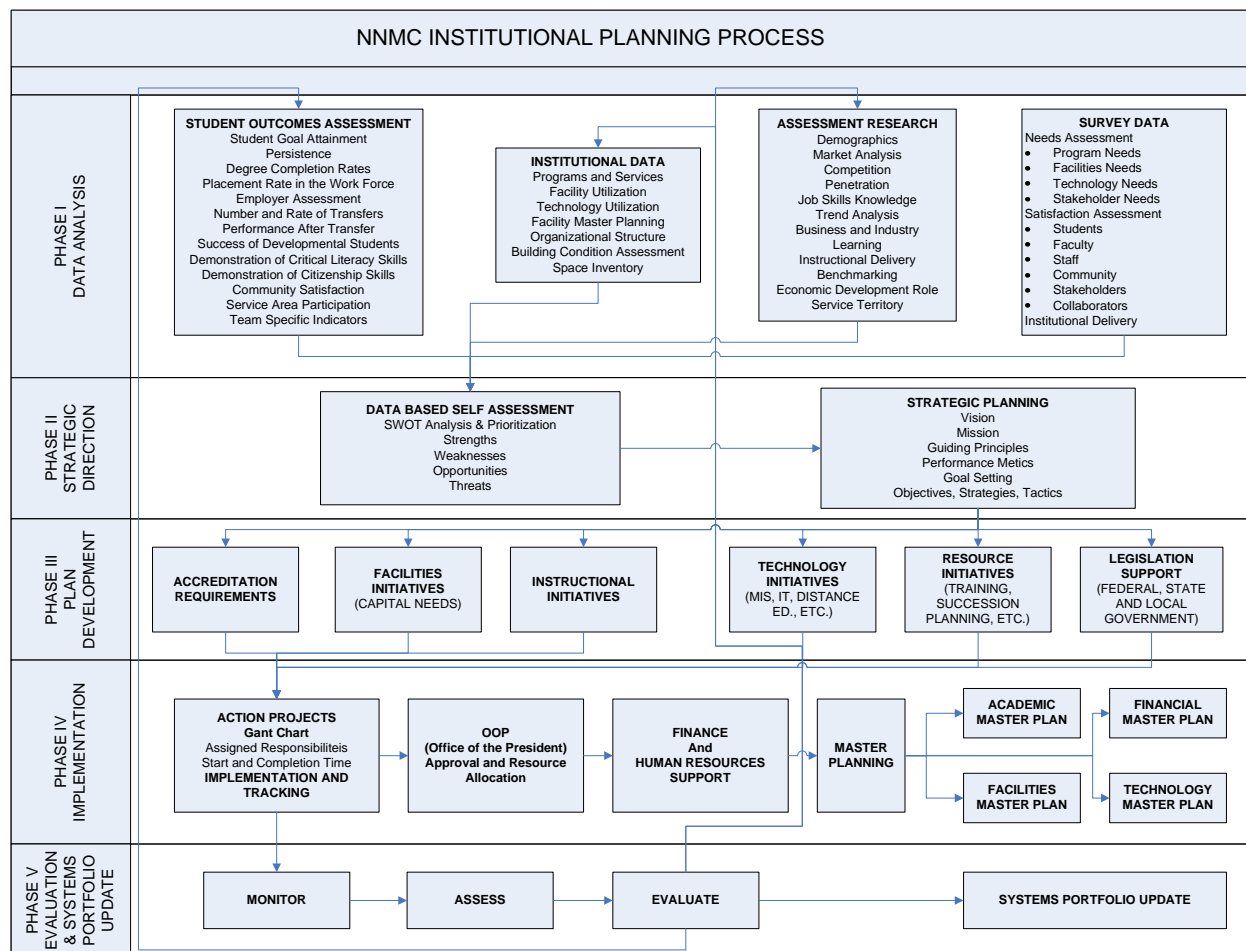


### Institutional Planning Process

NNMC’s Institutional Planning Process is highly integrated and highly focused on customer needs, both external and internal customer needs. It is the policy of NNMC that an annual Institutional Strategic Planning effort is undertaken to identify and prioritize opportunities for continuous quality improvement in pursuit of the institutions vision and mission, and in concert with the institutions Guiding Principles.

Following is NNMC’s Institutional Planning Process Flow Chart:





Five phases exist in Northern’s Institutional Strategic Planning Process, they include the following:

1. Phase I, Data Analysis - involves the development, collection and analysis of data from a variety of sources including: Student Learning Outcomes Assessments; Institutional Data; Assessment Research; and, Survey Data.
2. Phase II, Strategic Direction – involves Data Based Self Assessment via a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis, and a comprehensive Annual Strategic Planning.
3. Phase III, Plan Development – addresses the institutions’ Accreditation Requirements and a variety of initiatives including; facilities, instructional, technology, resources and legislative.



4. Phase IV, Implementation – assigns responsibility for implementation of the strategic plan's Action Plans (objectives, strategies and tactics) and tracks their completion. This phase also includes the Office of the President (OOP) review and approval – including funding when required for implementation. And finally, this phase updates master plans for academics, budgeting, technology, facilities and human resources.

5. Phase V, Evaluation – contemplates the monitoring, assessment and evaluation of the Strategic Plan Initiatives and provides this information as feedback data for the next annual Strategic Planning Cycle (PDCA).

Phase II of the Institutional Planning Process includes the Annual Strategic Planning Process which is made up of the following steps:

1. DATA IMMERSION - All contributors to this Strategic Planning Process are first immersed in facts and data relevant to the college, the region, student performance, community and business needs, staff and faculty. These data are presented in an effort to ground all participants with the same level of information and knowledge as a supplement to their own unique knowledge and insights.

2. SWOT ANALYSIS - Once the vision, mission and guiding principles are clearly identified, the university must analyze its external and internal environment. The environmental scan, performed within the frameworks of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analyzes information about organization's external environment (economic, social, demographic, political, legal, technological, and regional factors), the industry, and internal organizational factors. Labor Market Projections included herein are most valuable for the environmental scan.

3. VISION, MISSION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES - Identification of the organization's vision and mission is the first step of any strategic planning process. Northern's vision sets out the reasons for the organization's existence and the "ideal" state that the organization aims to achieve; the mission identifies major goals and performance objectives. Both are defined within the framework of the university's philosophy, and are used as a context for development and evaluation of intended and emergent strategies. One cannot overemphasize the importance of a clear vision and mission; none of the subsequent steps will matter if the organization is not certain where it is headed.

4. OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES AND TACTICS - Northern determines its objectives, strategies



and tactics based on (and consistent with) its vision and mission, within the framework of the Data Immersion and SWOT analyses. These Objectives, Strategies and Tactics are the fundamental issues the organization has to address to achieve its mission and move towards its desired future.

5. IMPLEMENTATION RESPONSIBILITIES AND TIME LINES - Without implementation, the strategic planning effort is only an exercise without meaning. Northern employs a project management approach to assuring that all of the Action Projects (objectives, strategies and tactics) have been assigned responsibility, a time line for their completion and an ongoing management tracking system to assure their completion, implementation and effectiveness assessment. Northern has adopted MS Project Software for these purposes.

The strategic planning process at Northern acknowledges and respects the richness and diversity of the college's communities. It continues with the development of departmental, college, and school plans; self-studies and planning studies in specific administrative areas; and a professional North Central New Mexico needs assessment. Individuals involved with these committees and studies are representative of Northern and its many parts.

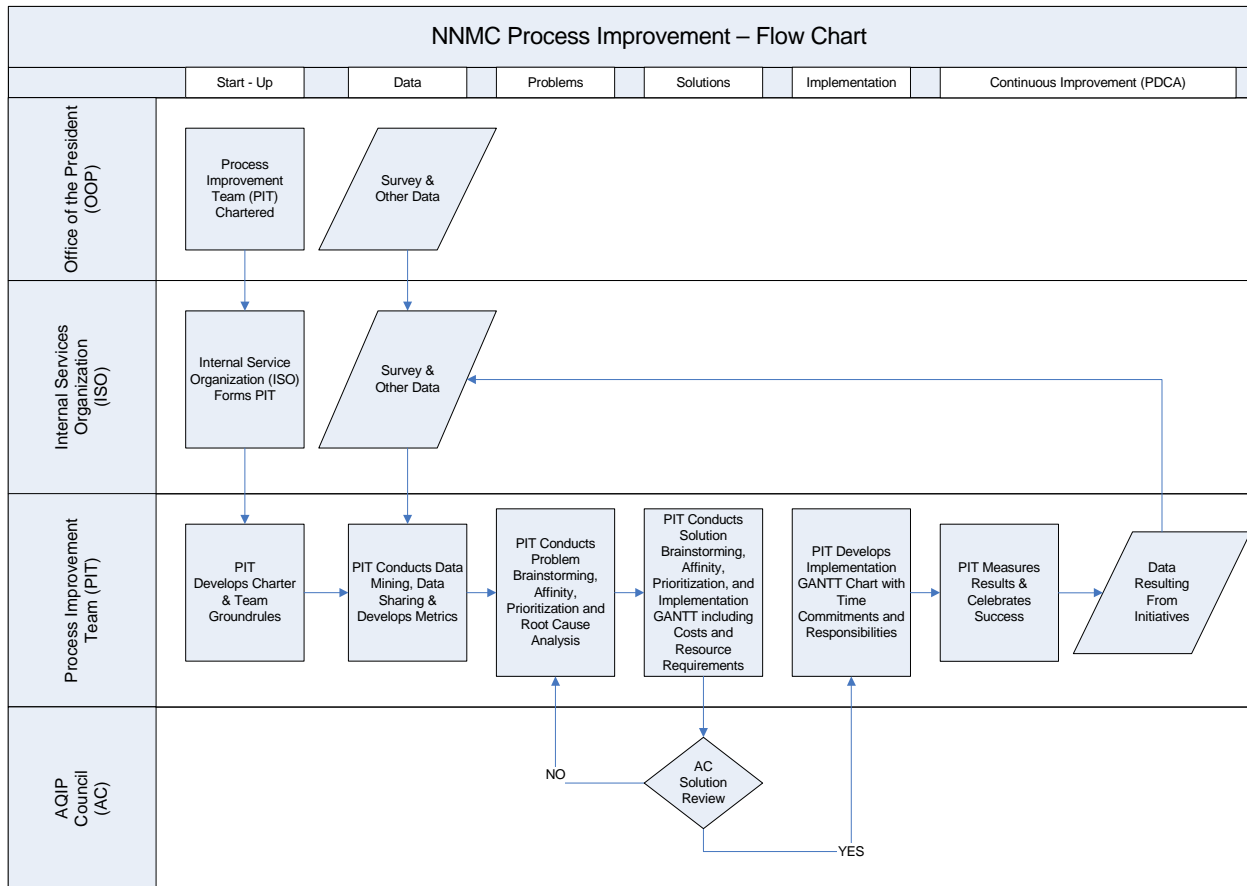
The final phase in the strategic planning process is blending the many, sometimes, divergent recommendations and revelations expressed in the various committee reports and studies into a common vision to advance Northern. In fashioning the whole from the parts, not every worthy hope and wish could be included, particularly in light of the budget constraints under which Northern operates. However, the strategic plan is not meant to be a static document. It will be successful to the degree that it addresses current aspirations and adapts and responds to changing conditions.

### **The Role of Quality Tools**

NNMC has provided training on quality tools and AQIP to Chairs, Deans, Directors, and all administrative personnel of the institution - including all PIT Chairpersons. The purpose of providing this training is to encourage and support the use of these tools to further enhance the organizations' effectiveness in decision making. These individuals and the institution's committees are more than accustomed to the use of Process Flow Charts; Gantt Charts; Ishakawa Diagrams; Interrelationship Diagrams; Affinity Diagrams; and other quality tools all designed to assure effective and efficient continuous improvement.



Following is NNMC’s Process Improvement Flow Chart depicting many of the quality tools employed by each of the Process Improvement Teams:



The number of PIT’s that are active at NNMC varies with the number of active action projects. Some PIT’s are continually seeking out opportunities for improvement and are therefore continuous. Others are short term focusing on only one opportunity for improvement. As of this writing, there are twenty-four active process improvement teams. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) asks that AQIP Institutions report on four Action Projects at a time. NNMC designates which four Action Projects it will report to the HLC. However, all of NNMC’s Action Projects are reportable to the institution as a whole, and as such are available on NNMC’s Web-Site for anyone to review.



## Conclusion

Effective strategic planning requires strong organizational support at every level of the institution. Numerous planning data sources have informed the development of our strategic plan, and AQIP has enabled an effective and efficient means by which to implement the plan. The college's commitment to Total Quality Management, Continuous Quality Improvement and its enthusiastic adoption of the Academic Quality Improvement Program throughout our institution, will further support the implementation of our strategic plans.

The strategic planning process has systematically identified and acknowledged our institutions strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. And, more importantly, helped identify the means by which we will build on our strengths, resolve our weaknesses, exploit opportunities, and finally, avoid or overcome our threats we face as an institution.

The economic and social well being of north central New Mexico is closely tied to the health and vigor of our college. Enhancing Northern's ability to fulfill its mission of instruction, and public service will promote the welfare of New Mexico. As a result of the AQIP integrated strategic planning process, we will rededicate our efforts to serve the people of New Mexico by the creation of new knowledge, and the transmission of that knowledge to the citizens of our state through excellent instruction and distinguished public service.



**Author's Biographical Information**

**(Thomas A. Garcia)**

**Current Professional Positions:**

Thomas A. Garcia currently serves as Executive Vice President and Chief Operations Officer of NORTHERN NEW MEXICO COLLEGE, located in Espanola, New Mexico. Mr. Garcia is also President and CEO of the TACTICAL ADVANTAGE GROUP, LLC, a consulting firm, located in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**Former Professional Positions:**

Mr. Garcia has held several positions within the private sector including: Executive Vice President and Major Investor of GRAVITON, INC., La Jolla, California (Graviton is a Distributed Wireless Sensor-Network Company - High Tech Entrepreneurial Start-up Business); President, CEO and Major Share Owner L&M TECHNOLOGIES, INC., Albuquerque, New Mexico (A \$30M High Tech Entrepreneurial Business); Deputy Laboratory Director (EVP Equivalent) at LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY (LANL), Los Alamos, New Mexico; Executive Vice President of U S WEST COMMUNICATIONS, INC. responsible for Public Policy at its Corporate Headquarters in Denver, Colorado; President and CEO of U S WEST COMMUNICATIONS, INC., responsible for New Mexico Operations, office in Albuquerque, New Mexico; and, President and CEO of U S WEST COMMUNICATIONS, INC., responsible for Arizona Operations, office in Phoenix, Arizona.

**Former Non-Profit Positions:**

Mr. Garcia has served in a number of executive positions in a number of non-profit organizations including but not limited to: Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer of YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, INCORPORATED (YDI) FOUNDATION, INC., headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Founder and Chairman of the Board and Interim President, LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY FOUNDATION, INC, headquartered in Los Alamos, New Mexico; and Chairman of the Board of Directors, NORTHERN NEW MEXICO COMMUNITY COLLEGE (NNMCC) FOUNDATION, INC., headquartered in Espanola, New Mexico; Director & Vice President, ALBUQUERQUE TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL INSTITUTE (TVI) FOUNDATION, INC., Albuquerque, New Mexico; Chairman of the Board of Directors, ALBUQUERQUE HISPANO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, Albuquerque, New Mexico; Director of Board of Trustees, NEW MEXICO HISPANIC CULTURAL FOUNDATION, Albuquerque, New Mexico; LOS ALAMOS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION Los Álamos, New Mexico; Board of Directors, LOS ALAMOS QUALITY NEW MEXICO



NETWORK, Los Alamos, New Mexico; Board of Directors, ECONOMIC FORUM, INC., Albuquerque, New Mexico; Board of Directors, NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY, CENTER FOR PUBLIC UTILITY REGULATION, Las Cruces, New Mexico; Board of Directors, NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY, GODDARD ADVISORY BOARD (ENGINEERING COLLEGE ADVISORY BOARD), Las Cruces, New Mexico; Board of Directors, FIRST SECURITY OF NEW MEXICO BANK, INC, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**Formal Education:**

Mr. Garcia holds engineering degrees in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, from New Mexico State University; a Masters Degree in Business Administration from the University of Denver; and, is currently a candidate for an Education Doctorate Degree (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership, from the University of New Mexico.

