

Transformation Summit Project Plan

I. A Brief Case for a Consultative Transformation Summit:

A. Introduction

Being a part of, responding to and complying with the demands of a post-apartheid political and policy environment, Rhodes University has embarked on a process of transformation from being an apartheid university to one that can be seen as articulating, in its practices, the aspired to values of a post- apartheid society. Post-apartheid values are those enshrined in the South African constitution. In its policy and other governing documents, the institution expresses a desire to deconstruct in symbolism and in practice the ideological assumptions, institutionalized practices and structures that reproduced and were normalised by the apartheid system. The culture defined as aspired to in institutional documents is one that enables students and staff from all demographic groups to equitably access the offerings of the institution and to equitably thrive in the environment of the institution.

B. The need for an inclusively planned and coherent trajectory.

Conversations on institutional change and transformation characterise Rhodes University life. These conversations take place as part of student and staff orientation programmes, in dialogues, conferences, transformation workshops, lecture theatres, divisions, departments, and faculty board meetings, residences, on face book pages, on Drodsty lawns and in other informal spaces. In the last two years, because of student protests, these conversations have grown more frequent and more urgent. While conversations on transformation are transformative in and of themselves in that they result in learning, debate and in the development of new knowledge and ideas, there is also need for transformation conversations that will directly feed into the crafting of a coherent institutional level transformation programme and strategy. Indeed, feedback collated from transformation workshops and transformation conversations convened and facilitated by the Equity and Institutional Culture Directorate unambiguously indicates that members of staff and students have what might be termed “transformation conversations fatigue”. Thus for example, in all introductory sessions of the twenty two transformation workshops convened for staff in 2016 a weariness at “talking about rather than doing transformation” was strongly expressed. Active participation in the workshops was elicited by an assurance that the output of the conversations would be used as a basis for planning which would lead to the implementation of transformation strategies and the participatory monitoring of the implementation of the strategies. Similarly in the majority of twenty seven events and dialogues with students convened by the directorate in which aspects of transformation were discussed, impatience with what is perceived as the prioritization of goalless conversations on transformation over

“real change” was strongly expressed. It is clear therefore that there is a need for transformation conversations and debates that are held for the clear purpose of feeding into the formulation and implementation of transformation strategies and of evaluating achievements against clearly stated goals. Without coherent transformation goals that have been adopted by the institution and a clear transformation road map, there is danger that the transformation efforts that are being made in the various corners of the institution will be largely experienced as ad hoc, uneven, incoherent, reformist and even as non-existent.

The need for consultative gatherings at which possible trajectories and strategies for institutional transformation are explored has been felt and responded to in the past. At the institutional level, for example, between 2006 and 2011, three Imbizos convened by the university’s leadership were held. Participants included members of council, the board of governors, senior management, student and union representatives, academic leadership and selected academic staff. The key issues discussed in relation to transformation were; institutional freedom and responsibility, the institution’s purpose, identity (including the name of the institution), and values, the institution’s responsiveness to the society in which it is situated, the conceptualisation of and pursuit of excellence and quality, innovation in the core functions of the institution which were defined as knowledge production and dissemination and community engagement, student enrolment and success, the staff profile, higher education and student funding, size and shape, planning and governance, race, class, disability and gender and general institutional culture. In addition to the three Imbizos, two Imbizos that had gender, sexuality and institutional culture as the theme for discussion were held in 2007 and 2013¹. The output of four of the Imbizos included implementable resolutions which were crafted as actions to be taken.

Two reviews of the institution’s transformation related trajectory concluded that while there has been success in implementing some of the resolutions taken at the Imbizos, a number of key actions were not implemented. The first review conducted in 2011 by Dr Saleem Badat concludes that with regards to transformation related resolutions the main achievements realized between 2006 and 2011 were the increase in the proportion of Black students, including a 10% increase in the proportion of Black South African students, and the establishment and growth of the Community Engagement Directorate (Badat, 2011). However, other key objectives such as the further interrogation and definition of the institution’s purpose, identity and values were not pursued. He notes that the exploration of an identity would not only have resulted in a more clearly defined vision and purpose, but it would have also resulted in a systemic contemplation of how a claimed identity and the “where leaders learn” slogan could be articulated innovatively, in practice, in the curriculum and in the culture of the institution (Badat, 2011). Such an exercise would also have, it can perhaps be assumed, laid the ground for the development of a shared understanding of an identity towards which the institution would strive to transform.

¹ The material produced as discussion documents and as output of the Imbizos is attached as appendices 1-10

One of the reasons given in the review for the lack of a coherent implementation of transformation related and other initiatives is that Rhodes University has an institutional culture characterized by an aversion to planning and to monitoring the impact of action taken and indeed of non-action. He wrote;

As an aspect of institutional culture, there is a strong laissez faire culture at Rhodes. This laissez faire culture is predicated on certain dubious assumptions and seemingly equates a laissez faire approach with safeguarding academic freedom and organisational autonomy. It is evidenced in a holding fast to doubtful conventional wisdoms and a seeming aversion to planning and prioritisation, quality assurance and, ultimately, quality promotion. The laissez faire approach is seemingly content to wait for problems to manifest before willing to address all too evident weaknesses and shortcomings. Ultimately, the laissez faire culture is an aversion also to any real democratic and peer accountability (Badat, 2011, p. 19).

A review of the same period undertaken in 2013 by the Equity and Institutional Culture Directorate found that key transformation initiatives effected include the development of equity related policies and the development and implementation of the Employment Equity plans and strategies (Equity and Institutional Culture Directorate, 2013). Both reviews record that there is still no overarching institutional strategy and plan, an output which the 2006 Imbizo was expected to result in, and which institutional transformation strategies could be developed as an integral part of. With particular reference to the 2006 Imbizo, the Review of Transformation Related Strategy, Plans and Initiatives states that “What is sorely lacking is a mechanism for systematically recording the outcomes, ensuring implementation, monitoring effectiveness of implementation and generally pulling things together.” (Equity and Institutional Culture Directorate, 2013, p. 27). An office or management structure that is resourced, empowered and supported to monitor the implementation of transformation policies and initiatives still does not exist.

Despite the observed aversion to planning and the absence of an overarching institutional strategy, between 2013 and 2016 a number of transformation planning initiatives were undertaken. An Institutional Transformation Plan drafted in 2014 using existing literature and statistics was incorporated into the draft of the Institutional Development Plan. The Institutional Development Plan is still in the process of being drafted. The Institutional Transformation plan has no independent status. The key weakness of the transformation plan is that its development was not preceded by broad institution wide consultation. There is therefore no institutional ownership of the plan. Five faculties also produced faculty transformation plans which have been operationalized to varying degrees. The majority of Faculty Deans have expressed the opinion that while transformation efforts continue to be made in faculties and departments, the transformation project requires cohesion and coherence across faculties and divisions. They have also observed that due to various factors, including the shift in transformation priorities in the higher education sphere ushered in by the student protests, the plans drawn up in 2013 do not adequately respond to today’s higher education environment (Personal communication January, 2017). (It is important to note here that the students did not only shift the perspective on transformation priorities but they also brought to the fore the fact that the very meaning of the concept of transformation is contested). Another initiative can be found in the Vice Chancellor’s 2015 inauguration speech. In the speech, the Vice Chancellor outlined a vision of transformation of the institution and of the town in

which it is situated. The work that would translate the vision into a broadly agreed on and holistic strategy and plan for institutional transformation has, however, not been undertaken.

There does exist, therefore, a number of transformation plans in various stages of development, which have varying levels of operationalization, whose goals have been outstripped by the demands of a rapidly changing context and which do not have an overarching institutional level vision to cohere with. Therefore, besides a need for an inclusively planned, and coherent institutional level trajectory of transformation, there is also a need for coherent implementation of an institutional plan for transformation that is informed by the current Higher Education sector and Rhodes University environments.

C. The need for an accelerated pace of transformation.

Feedback collated from transformation workshops and transformation conversations convened and facilitated by the Equity and Institutional Culture Directorate also unambiguously indicates that the majority of members of staff and students experience the institution as too slow in transforming.

Indeed, the staff survey conducted in 2014 revealed that, in general, staff members at Rhodes are dissatisfied with the institution's pace of transformation. The survey also revealed that it was Black members of staff who experienced the pace of transformation as being too slow. Thus 88% of African, 78% of Coloured, 75% of Indian and 37% of White staff members agreed with the statement that "Rhodes University needs to "transform more quickly in order to better reflect South Africa's diversity" (Equity and Institutional Culture Directorate, 2015, p. 48).

The 2015/16 student protests are also a strong and clear indication of the need of an accelerated pace of transformation. Some of the issues raised as needing urgent attention by protesting students are issues that the institution and the institution's leadership has deliberated on and has addressed on an ad hoc rather than on a planned basis over long periods of time. An example which can be given here is the short vacation accommodation issue. Another example of a matter which has long been deliberated on and which was again raised by protesting students in 2015 is the future of the name of the institution. A strategy designed by the Institutional Forum in 2015 to address this matter could not be implemented due to matters external to the functioning of the institution.

D. The Council's call for a Transformation Summit.

Given the lack of a defined and planned trajectory for transformation and recognizing the need for an accelerated transformation programme, in May 2016 the University Council resolved that a Rhodes University Transformation summit at which transformation would be discussed

holistically and systemically will be held. It was also stated that the process and the event of the summit should be “inclusive, consultative, open and well publicized” (Rhodes University Council, 2016). Council also resolved that the summit discussions and the output would inform the crafting of the institution’s transformation trajectory.

A statement inviting the Rhodes Community to participate in a transformation summit that would “consolidate and provide impetus to the University’s transformation journey and devise a less cumbersome process to address demands regarding the name of the University” was sent out by the Chair of Council on 8th June 2016. In the statement the Chair of Council also indicated that he would discuss the process leading to and the form that should be taken by the Summit with the Institutional Forum. The Chair of Council also stated that the Institutional Forum would determine the categories of stakeholders who would participate in the Summit (V. Kahla. June 8, 2016).

E. The Institutional Forum and the Governance of Transformation.

The Institutional Forum is mandated by the 1997 Higher Education Act to advise Council on institutional transformation matters. Following the expression of dissatisfaction with the pace of transformation in the Higher Education sector by various stakeholders including students and staff nationally, Section 31 of the Higher Education Act has been amended to state that Councils must not only consider the advice on transformation matters that they receive from the Institutional Forums, but they should also “provide written reasons if the advice is not accepted” (Higher Education Amendment Act of 2017). This amendment is designed to better enable Institutional Forums, which are, in the main, constituted of staff and student representatives, to provide leadership in the transformation of Higher Education institutions. As an instance of fulfilling its function and of improving its capability to fulfil its duty, the Rhodes University Institutional Forum will oversee the process of preparing for and the convening of the transformation summit. The Institutional Forum will also use the outputs of the process and event of the summit to formulate its advice to Council on the institution’s transformation trajectory.

F. Date of the Summit

The two events of the summit will be held on the 28th to the 30th of July 2017.

II. The Summit process.

The basic processes of the summit are depicted in Figures 1, 2 and 3

Figure 1. High Level Summit Process

December	February/March	March- June	Early July	July	August
An Institutional Forum Task Team that will oversee the summit process and event is formed.	Transformation summit process facilitator groups are formed. The formation is facilitated by E&IC office.	Transformation dialogues and other forms of engagement which are open to all members of the institution are convened and designed by summit process facilitator groups.	Outputs of dialogues and other engagements are collated into background material by selected scribes.	The summit event is held on July 28 th - 30 th 2017.	A report on the summit proceedings and recommendations is collated by the E&IC office and submitted to the Institutional Forum and Council

As shown in figures 1 and 2, leading up to the event of the summit there will be twelve discussion groups formed. The groups are listed in the first column of figure 2. These groups, coordinated by discussion group facilitators and each with a different focus, will host a series of transformation dialogues to which all members of the Rhodes community will be invited. The dialogues will be structured discussions of the transformation of various aspects of the institution from the perspective of each group. A Rhodes University Transformation Summit face book page, which will be used as another forum for discussion will be created. The page will be moderated by the Equity and Institutional Culture Office. In addition, each discussion group will also manage its own face book discussion page. The outputs of the dialogues and the face book discussions will be used as the basis for the development of background material which will be presented to the summit. To enable maximum participation, the dialogues will be held in the evenings² and during the lunch break. Each discussion group will be assigned a scribe. Figure 3 is a visual representation of a structured discussion that foregrounds the interrelationships between each aspect of the institution.

² Transport will be provided for staff and students who live in the township who attend evening dialogues.

Figure 2. Summit Discussion Groups, Process and Outputs.

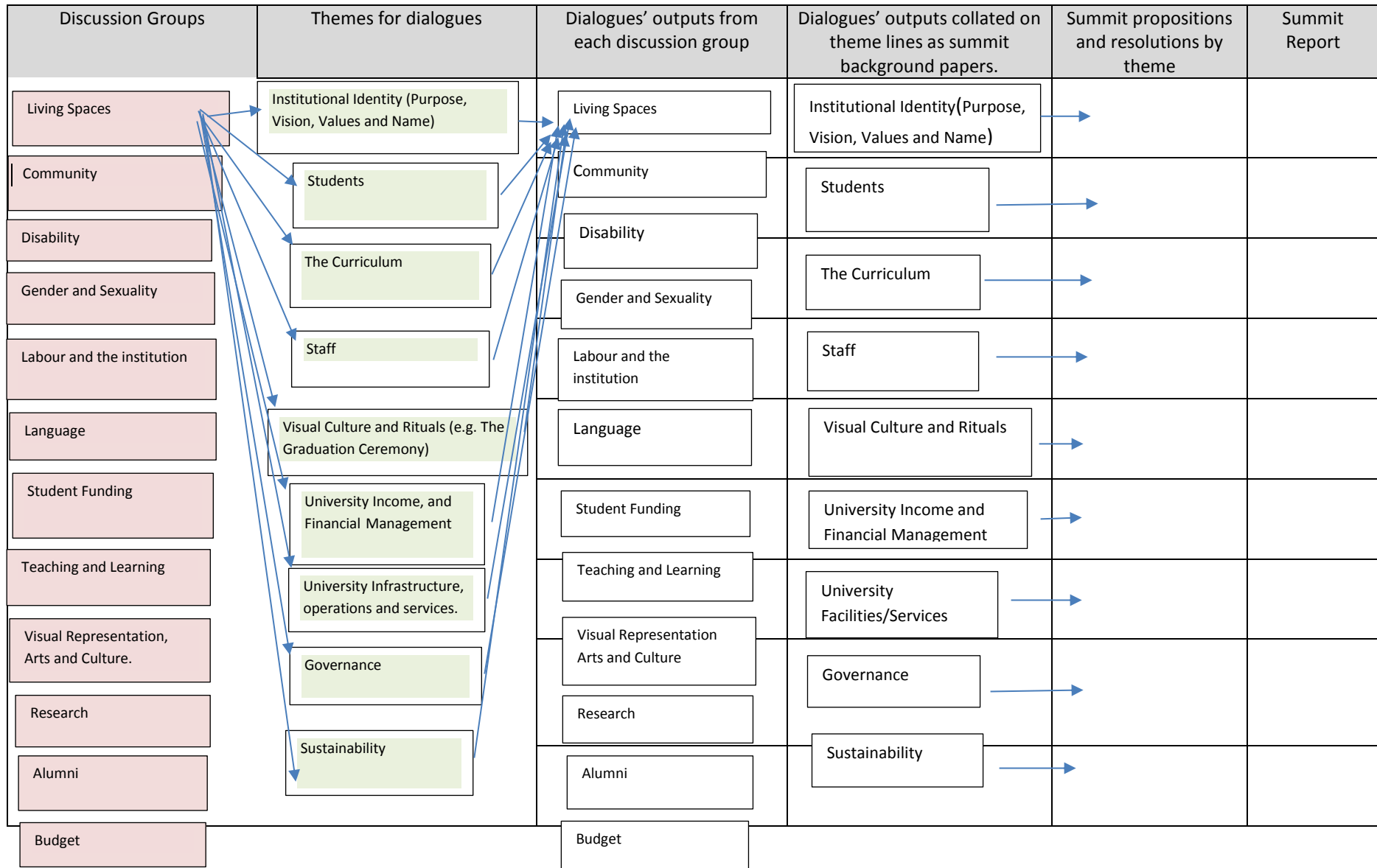
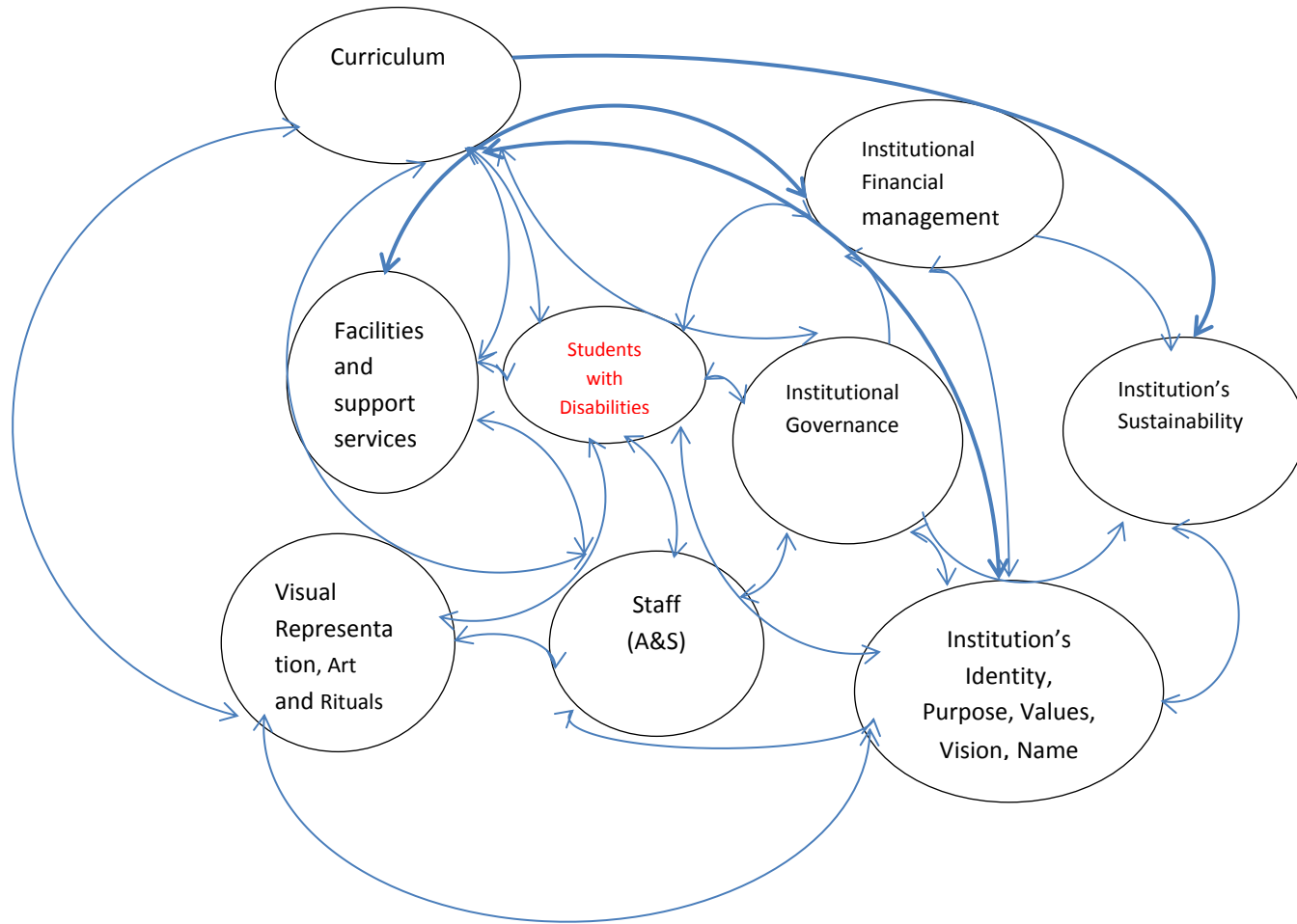


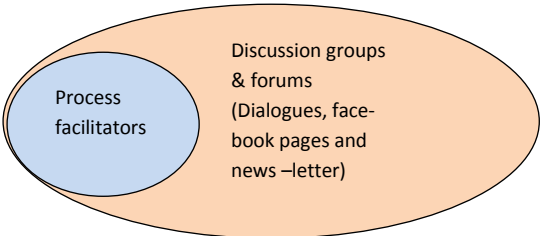
Figure 3. An example of a structured discussion: Students with disabilities (Key/Direct relationships)



III. Governance of the summit process.

A task team constituted of members of the Institutional Forum will oversee the preparations for and the convening of the summit. The Equity and Institutional Culture Office which will be managing and coordinating the summit process and the discussion group facilitators who will be coordinating the work of the discussion groups will meet with the Institutional Forum Summit Task Team (IFSTT) fortnightly.

IV. Team and Key Responsibilities.

People	Responsible for	Period
Institutional Forum Summit Task Team	Overseeing the preparation for and convening of the summit.	December - June
	Overseeing the collation and dissemination of summit output.	December - June
	Reporting on progress to various stakeholders including the Institutional Forum and Council.	January - June
Office of Equity and Institutional Culture	Managing and coordinating the summit preparation process, summit event convening and the production and dissemination of summit output.	December - June
	Managing and coordinating summit related communication and publicity.	December - June
	Reporting on progress to various stakeholder groups.	January - June
	Producing the summit report.	
 Discussion Group Process Facilitators/Coordinators	Forming discussion groups and convening dialogues.	February -May
	Working with IFTT to draw up the summit agenda summit attendance lists.	February-March.
	Working with scribes to produce summit background material.	March-April
Scribes	Recording key ideas and propositions of each seminar and working with discussion group facilitators to produce summit material.	February –April.
	Recording summit propositions, recommendations and resolutions.	May

V. Conclusion

The Higher Education environment is rapidly changing and filled with uncertainty and ambiguity. The transformation summit should ideally enable the institution to develop a common understanding of what the institution needs to be and do in order to change with rather than be changed by history. This understanding will, it is hoped, foster an increase in the institution's ability to negotiate the space it is in with agility and with certainty of its purpose and of its relevance.

References:

Badat, S. (2011) "Critical Reflections on Rhodes 2006-2011." Rhodes University.

Equity and Institutional Culture Directorate (2013) "Rhodes Six Year Review of Transformation Related Strategy, Plans and Initiatives". Rhodes University

Equity and Institutional Culture Directorate (2015) "Rhodes University Institutional Culture Survey". Rhodes University.