

Strategic Planning

Tip Sheet

Step 3 calls for the development of a comprehensive prevention plan. By all intentions, this can also be called a Strategic Plan –separate from an Evaluation Plan or Sustainability Plan. The Strategic Plan drives all these other plans by articulating basic concepts of vision, mission, goals, objectives and activities. The following information provides some general guidelines about key elements of a strategic plan. As you will see, there is great flexibility about how your County wants to approach the strategic planning process.

Background

Strategic planning determines where an organization is going over the next several years, how it's going to get there and how it'll know if it got there or not. The plan includes specific products that will direct the County's prevention activities. Even though you may have previously developed vision and objectives, the planning process provides an opportunity for partners and staff to establish common language and involvement in the County's prevention system. Prevention services can be greatly enhanced by developing clear vision and mission statements, objectives, comprehensive strategies, and detailed action plans.

The Partners for Substance Abuse Prevention (PARTNERS), whose web site is sponsored by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention ([CSAP](#)) /Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, defines strategic planning as follows:

A deliberate set of steps that

- assesses needs and resources;
- defines a target audience and a set of goals and objectives;
- plans and designs coordinated strategies with evidence of success;
- logically connects these strategies to needs, assets, and desired outcomes; and
- measures and evaluates the process and outcomes.

Strategic Planning

There are a variety of ways to approach strategic planning. The way that a strategic plan is developed depends on the nature of the County prevention leadership, culture of the County, complexity of the organization's environment, size, expertise of planners, etc. Similarly, the specific process, planning period, and specific stakeholder participation can all vary. Most agree that annual review of action plans is critical, but the shelf life of a Strategic Plan can vary from one to three to five years.

The 11 core elements are described below as a template, followed by discussion of each:

- 1) Preparation for planning
- 2) Vision
- 3) **SWOT** analysis
- 4) Context (Needs Assessment/Demographic Profile)
- 5) Mission
- 6) Problem Statement
- 7) Strategies (Determine Rational for approach)
- 8) Goals
- 9) Objectives
- 10) Action plans/activities
- 11) Evaluation

1. Preparation for Planning:

In order to be ready for the planning process:

- ✓ Be sure all the participants understand the basics of strategic planning; share a draft agenda prior to the sessions, along with any relevant reading materials.
- ✓ Schedule at least two three-hour sessions (this is a minimum estimate) with plenty of notice to your participants. Secure a facility that facilitates open thinking and that is comfortable for all.
- ✓ Consider whether you need an independent facilitator, or whether this task can be shared among participants. If you want an independent facilitator, the Community Prevention Institute (<http://www.ca-cpi.org/>) can probably provide one at no cost.
- ✓ Carefully consider who should participate. Be sure that key leadership in your department is included in the process. Many prevention departments might also want to include essential community partners.
- ✓ Finally, figure out a plan to evaluate your sessions. The most basic outcome is that your plan is completed, but consider ways to evaluate other features, such as communication, productiveness of session, other training or assistance needs and so forth.

Who Should Be Involved in Planning?

Strategic planning should be conducted by a planning team. Consider the following guidelines when developing the team.

- ✓ The Alcohol and Drug Administrator and Prevention Coordinator should be included in the planning group, and should drive development and implementation of the plan.
- ✓ Establish clear expectations and clarify roles for participants; there are roles for those directly involved in planning, those who will provide key information to the process, those who will review the plan document, those who will authorize the document, etc. Each participant should understand the overall direction of the process and her/his independent roles.

- ✓ Always include at least one person who ultimately has authority to make strategic decisions, for example, to select which goals will be achieved and how.
- ✓ Ensure that as many stakeholders as possible are involved in the planning process.
- ✓ Involve someone to administrate the process, including arranging meetings, helping to record key information, helping with flipcharts, monitoring status of preparation, etc.

The number of meetings depends on the amount of prior planning and the number of pending strategic issues. In addition, every “culture” has preferences about short or long meetings, and how much time they can commit. Given these parameters, the planning should be completed over no more that two to three months, with sessions spaced no more than two to three weeks apart or momentum will be lost.

2. Vision

Your department or agency may already have a vision statement with which you want to align. If there isn’t such a vision statement, or if the vision is not specific enough to alcohol and other drug prevention, you can begin your planning with the development of a vision statement.

Vision is a long range picture of how the “world will be” if you’re successful in your work. The California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs vision is:

ADP's Vision Statement

Healthy individuals and communities free of alcohol and other drug problems.

ADP's Strategic Vision Statement

Californians understand that alcoholism and drug addiction are chronic conditions that can be successfully prevented and treated.

3. SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

SWOT analysis can be done at both internal and external levels. SWOT provides additional context for strategic decision making. An *internal analysis* helps you plan for the future by articulating how the organization operates right now. It can reveal trends, irregularities, limitations, and opportunities. To perform an internal analysis, gather information about the organization's strengths and weaknesses, services, programs, activities, staffing, and finances. This can be done via self-assessment by planning participants, or by gathering input from stakeholders ahead of the planning session through a survey.

An **external analysis** helps you understand how the organization is perceived externally and what societal factors may affect its future. External factors may include things like the economy, funding trends, demographics, social factors, technology changes, competition, politics, regulatory factors, and public opinion.

Here is some information on SWOT Analysis taken from the University of Kansas Community Tool Box (<http://ctb.ku.edu>):

What is a SWOT analysis and why should you use one?

The name says it: **S**trength, **W**eakness, **O**pportunity, **T**hreat. A SWOT analysis guides you to identify the positives and negatives inside your organization (S-W) and outside of it, in the external environment (O-T). Developing a full awareness of your situation can help with both strategic planning and decision-making.

The SWOT method (which is sometimes called TOWS) was originally developed for business and industry, but it is equally useful in the work of community health and development, education, and even personal growth.

SWOT is not the only assessment technique you can use, but is one with a long track record of effectiveness. Compare it with other tools found in the Community Tool Box (especially [Chapter 3: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/chapter_1003.htm](http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/chapter_1003.htm)) to determine if this is the right approach for your situation. The strengths of this method are its simplicity and application to a variety of levels of operation.

When do you use SWOT?

A SWOT analysis can offer helpful perspectives at any stage of an effort. You might use it to:

- Explore possibilities for new efforts or solutions to problems.
- Make decisions about the best path for your initiative. Identifying your opportunities for success in context of threats to success can clarify directions and choices.
- Determine where change is possible. If you are at a juncture or turning point, an inventory of your strengths and weaknesses can reveal priorities as well as possibilities.
- Adjust and refine plans mid-course. A new opportunity might open wider avenues, while a new threat could close a path that once existed.

SWOT also offers a simple way of communicating about your initiative or program and an excellent way to organize information you've gathered from studies or surveys.

What are the elements of a SWOT analysis?

A SWOT analysis focuses on the four elements of the acronym, but the graphic format you use varies depending on the depth and complexity of your effort.

Remember that the purpose of performing a SWOT is to reveal positive forces that work together and potential problems that need to be addressed or at least recognized. Before you conduct a SWOT session, decide what format or layout you will use to communicate these issues most clearly for you.

We will discuss the process of creating the analysis below, but first here are a few sample layouts-ideas of what your SWOT analysis can look like.

You can list internal and external opposites side by side. Ask participants to answer these simple questions: what are the strengths and weaknesses of your group, community, or effort, and what are the opportunities and threats facing it?

4. Context

Separate from SWOT, many groups find it helpful to place their prevention work in the context of some very basic facts, including:

- ✓ Population demographics
- ✓ Economic trends
- ✓ Area growth forecast
- ✓ Operating considerations, such as time or staff constraints, budget issues, etc.
- ✓ Guiding principles or philosophy in the department or county government

The participants can identify and discuss these items as a backdrop for planning.

5. Mission

Your department or agency may already have a mission statement that you want to align with. If there isn't such a mission statement, or if the mission is not specific enough to alcohol and other drug prevention, you can work with your participants to draft a mission statement.

A mission is at the core of why you're doing the work you do. A mission statement reflects purpose and may include some strategy reflection. Crafting a good mission statement can be challenging. Sometime it is helpful to seek consensus on core elements, and then have volunteers later put the core pieces together for the group's later review.

Here are some examples of mission statements:

ADP's Mission Statement

To lead California's strategy to reduce alcohol and other drug problems by developing, administering, and supporting prevention and treatment programs.

Prevention by Design's Mission Statement

Assist California counties and prevention providers in having effective, outcome-based AOD prevention programs through our relationship-driven Regional Trainer network, supported by the Berkeley office and by work with other technical assistance providers.

6. Problem Statement

Many planners include a problem statement in their strategic plan. A problem statement summarizes key issues facing the county, and provides a helpful backdrop to understand strategic choices. A good problem statement includes information about:

- ✓ Community needs
- ✓ Community AOD assessment, including data
- ✓ Current knowledge
- ✓ Contributing factors and root causes
- ✓ Assessment of community readiness
- ✓ Assessment of existing leadership and resources

The University of Kansas Community Tool Box identifies four criteria for functional problem statements:

1. They name one problem at a time;
2. They avoid blame;
3. They do not frame the problem as the absence of the solution; and
4. They frame the problem as too much of a bad condition/behavior or not enough of a good condition/behavior.

Also, problem statements should be framed as either:

- Lack of/too few of a positive condition (e.g. all children should feel safe in their schools)
- Presence of/too much of a negative condition (e.g. Too many middle school students are using inhalants)

7. "Our Approach" Rationale

This is a narrative section in the Strategic Plan where Counties can spell out and justify their choices about their targets and strategies. What target population or setting? And why? Why this strategic priority? Why some strategies and not others?

This rationale should rely heavily on the countywide assessment, and on the County's view of best practices.

8. Goals & Objectives

Goals are simply a clear statement of the mission, specifying the accomplishments to be achieved if the mission is to become real. The target objectives are even clearer statements of the specific activities required to achieve the goals, starting from the current status.

At this point, strategic planning begins to produce lots of ideas and action steps. Often the scope of this activity can be managed by delegating different topics to different teams.

Objectives basically address the difference between where we are (current status), and where we want to be (vision and goals), by spelling out what we do (target objectives and action plans) to get there.

Objectives are specific, measurable results produced while implementing strategies. While identifying objectives, keep asking “Are you sure you can do this?” For best results within the County internal team, integrate the objectives as performance criteria in each “implementer’s” job description and performance review.

Some Definitions:

Goal: Goal is the end toward which the program is directed. It is the general statement of a long-range purpose. Goals should directly address needs. Goals are outcome and not process oriented. They clearly state, specific, measurable outcome(s) or change(s) that can be reasonably expected at the conclusion of a methodically selected intervention.¹

Objective: Objective is a statement of the results to be achieved, and includes a time frame, target of change, specific results to be achieved, method of measuring the results, and criteria for successful achievement. Objectives state results, not activities. Objectives, when accomplished, lead to the goal. Objectives should be stated in ways that describe what you will do and how you will do it. A performance indicator is an example of a program objective.

Some Examples of Goal Statements:

By 2016, the number of 8th graders using marijuana will decrease by 20%.

By 2010, the percentage of 8th graders that report that they resisted pressure to use meth will increase by 10%.

¹ Partners for Substance Abuse Prevention, Resources: Glossary.
http://preventionpartners.samhsa.gov/resources_glossary_p2.asp

9. Action plans/ Activities

Action plans basically translate the Strategic Plan into implementation steps. Some Counties may put these two items (Strategic Plan + Action Plan) into one document, others keep them separate. Ideally the people who will be responsible for implementing the plan are involved in developing the Strategic Plan. Use a cross-functional team to ensure the plan is realistic and collaborative. A few tips about Action Plans:

- ✓ Organize the overall strategic plan into smaller action plans for each objective.
- ✓ Specify who is doing what and by when.
- ✓ While these may be separate documents, keep them linked in everyone's mind.
- ✓ Build in regular reviews of status of the implementation of the plan.
- ✓ Translate the strategic plan's actions into job descriptions and personnel performance reviews, especially for key leaders.
- ✓ Communicate the role of follow-ups to the plan. If people know the action plans will be regularly reviewed, implementers tend to do their jobs before they're checked on.
- ✓ Be sure to document and distribute the plan, including inviting review input from all.
- ✓ Be sure that one internal person is identified as the lead in managing implementation.
- ✓ Integrate the plan's goals and objectives into the chief executive's performance reviews.

Format of Action Plans

There are many ways to structure an Action Plan, but many look like a work plan along these lines:

Goal #__						
Objectives	Tasks/ Activities	Timeline	Lead Role	Strategies Used	Measure / Document	Resources needed

10. Evaluation

Evaluation itself is covered as part of Step 5 in the Planning Guide, but at this point we must emphasize that thinking about evaluation must begin in Step 1. Evaluation plans are required as part of SPF implementation, but more importantly, an evaluation plan helps you see if you're on track and achieving the goals you intended to. Fortunately, good work during Step One Assessment makes it easier to track outcomes, as you hopefully have set up a system to return to measures and note change. Data collection in this regard should be integrated in the Action Plan with clear timeframes and responsibilities spelled out.