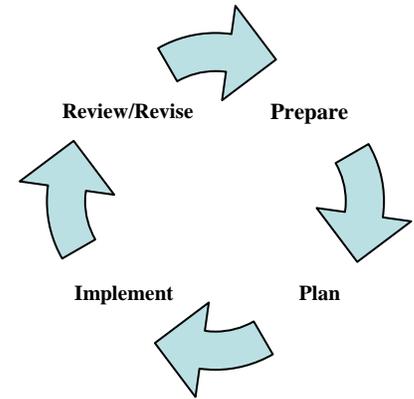


Four Stages of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a continual process for improving organizational performance by developing strategies to produce results. It involves looking at where the agency wants to go, assessing the agency's current situation, and developing and implementing approaches for moving forward. We utilize a framework comprised of four distinct stages:



1. Prepare

Three critical steps must be accomplished prior to developing a strategic plan:

- visioning,
- assessment, and
- the development and implementation of a planning process.

In each of these areas, you will need to review and build on what is already in place—vision and mission statements, agency- and/or state-wide assessments, and input from ongoing groups of internal and external stakeholders already engaged in planning.

2. Plan

To develop the plan, you must establish priorities by considering the needs, strengths, and resources of your organization. Three key questions must be answered:

- What do we want to accomplish?
- What will we do to get there?
- How will we know if we are making progress?

Once you have a draft document, circulate it for input, revise and finalize.

3. Implement

The following steps ensure that plans are used to guide the work of the organization:

- Communicating or "marketing" the plan,
- managing the implementation of the plan,
- supervising the actual work, and
- monitoring and reporting progress on the plan.

4. Review/Revise

This stage starts the cycle over again, allowing the plan to be continuously updated. This will keep it current and meaningful to the organization. On an ongoing basis the organization should:

- conduct assessments of its performance by gathering and analyzing information;
- convene the planning group to review performance and reassess goals, outcomes, strategies, and action steps and to make recommendations for changes; and
- revise the plan.

To the extent that the plan is updated, it will stay current and meaningful to the organization.

A strong strategic planning process can be a powerful tool for systemic change within child welfare agencies and keep agencies focused on improving outcomes for children and families. Throughout the process, ongoing communication is critical.

