

Effective Strategic Planning for Child Welfare Agencies

What is strategic planning?

Strategic planning is a continual process for improving organizational performance and making and sustaining systemic change. Guided by the agency's vision and mission, it involves assessing the agency's current situation, developing and implementing approaches to moving forward, and evaluating progress. Strategic planning needs to be led by agency decision makers, engage managers and staff at all levels, and actively involve a broad range of stakeholders.

For child welfare agencies, strategic planning processes are integral to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plans (PIPs). In addition, there are other federally required planning processes, and agencies do strategic planning under state initiatives and in response to settlement agreements and consent decrees. These planning processes all have the potential to improve agency performance.

Rationale for strategic planning

A strong strategic planning process can be a powerful tool for systemic change within child welfare agencies focusing on improving outcomes for children

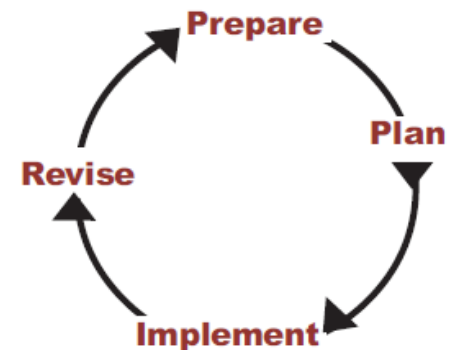
and families:

- Strategic plans allow agencies to operationalize their vision, values and practice principles.
- Strategic plans can act like a compass, providing a guide for agency managers as they make decisions about programs, resources and priorities.
- The continual cycle of planning—including regular reassessment of needs and strategies—helps agencies respond to needs, adapt to change and correct mistakes.
- As a broad range of staff and stakeholders engage in an ongoing strategic planning process, more critical players understand and become involved in program improvement work.
- As the agency implements, monitors and revises strategies to achieve outcomes, the process enables the agency to continually move closer to its goals.

How we can help

Our training and technical assistance is designed to build agency capacity for effective strategic planning. We assist agencies in developing planning structures and implementing planning processes. This work

draws on the framework we have developed for strategic planning with four distinct stages: prepare, plan, implement and revise.



To help agencies use these processes, we promote key features of effective planning:

- **Organizational leadership and vision:** To build commitment to the planning process, we help agencies engage leadership and develop or clarify their vision. Vision and leadership are essential to making improvement and effecting systemic change within an organization.
- **Key stakeholder involvement:** We help agencies create and sustain involvement of a broad range of key stakeholders in the planning process. Many players are critical to the success of the child welfare system, and broad consultation helps create and sustain commitment to program improvements.

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- **Strategies to operationalize the vision:** We work with agencies to develop specific actions and initiatives they can take to make their vision real, so that the agency moves towards the vision on all levels – from case practice to agency-wide outcomes.

- **Outcomes, measures, data:** We help agencies identify outcomes and specific performance measures they can use to measure progress. We also help them identify and use data in the planning process.

- **Integrated planning:** We help agencies integrate multiple federal planning requirements to ensure realistic and workable plans.

We help agencies implement and revise strategic plans on an ongoing basis, so that the plan is a living document that promotes and helps sustain a commitment to systemic change. Our T/TA focus includes:

- **Involving all staff:** We help agencies use strategies to build awareness and involvement of all staff in the plan, including front line caseworkers, supervisors and regional staff.

For example, we have helped agencies develop regional plans that engage local staff in developing and tracking progress on regional goals

- **Improving supervision:** Supervisors have a critical role in improving practice and managing change. We help agencies promote the importance of supervision and develop strategies to improve and strengthen supervision.

- **Communication plans:** We work with agencies to communicate provisions of the plan to all relevant stakeholders, both within and outside of the agency.

- **System-wide change:** We help agencies develop and implement comprehensive plans, which recognize the importance of involving all parts of the agency to work toward change – i.e., quality improvement, training, supervisors, budgets and resources.

- **Change management:** We help agencies assign and clarify roles and responsibilities played by different actors, and develop

specific work plans to implement strategic plans.

- **Organizational structure:** We help agencies see how systemic change, fitting into a plan that is helping the agency move toward improved outcomes.

Resources

See our website for resources and tools on strategic planning:

www.nrcoi.org

Sample resources:

- *Strategic Planning for Child Welfare Agencies, 2004:* describes a four-stage process for strategic planning: Preparation, Planning, Implementation, Review and Revise, illustrated with examples from state and county child welfare agencies.

- *CFSR Comprehensive Training and Technical Assistance Package:* includes modules on strategic planning, leading systemic change, and strengthening supervision as a key practice change strategy.

For more information: Contact the NRCOI by phone: 1-800-435-7543 or email: helpkids@usm.maine.edu.

NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE RESOURCE CENTER FOR ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

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