

Strategic Partnership for a Competitive Workforce Strategic Planning Guide

This document offers guidance to teams that have participated in Institutes sponsored by the Strategic Partnerships for a Competitive Workforce Initiative (Partnership Initiative) in developing a strategic plan. The document consists of a set of guidelines and a template to be used as a guide only. We believe this guide to be helpful, but it is not intended to restrict teams from developing strategic plans with their own format and vision. Teams are encouraged to adapt the materials and information provided here to meet the needs of particular circumstances as they develop and implement their career pathways system.

Background

In their effort to support communities building comprehensive workforce and education solutions that meet the needs of local business and industry, the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor have established The Partnership Initiative offering technical and other assistance to Community Based Job Training grantees. The Initiative identified a three-pronged strategy for achieving its purpose: Building and strengthening partnerships; developing and expanding career pathways; and providing technical assistance and information sharing to teams and communities seeking to strengthen local partnerships and career pathway systems.

Developing a Strategic Plan

One of the desired outcomes of The Partnership Initiative Institutes is for teams to develop a strategic plan to guide their collaboration. While those teams that participate in The Partnership Initiative Institutes are not required to develop a formal strategic plan before, during, or even after attending an Institute, doing so is a natural and important step in implementing or strengthening career pathways systems. Teams that intend to continue the work they began during an Institute, are therefore encouraged to undertake this step. The sponsoring federal agencies are pleased to provide technical assistance to teams to develop a strategic plan through this tool as well as a Webinar.

What is a Strategic Plan? Definitions abound, as do many types of Strategic Plans. In their book, Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide and Workbook, Michael Allison and Jude Hayes describe the strategic planning process as follows:

“Strategic Planning is a systematic process through which an organization or partnership agrees on—and builds commitment among key stakeholders to—priorities that are essential to its mission and are responsive to the environment.

Strategic planning guides the acquisition and allocation of resources—human and fiscal—to achieve these priorities.”¹

For this Initiative, Strategic Plans should include at least the following elements:

- A mission statement, goals, measurable objectives and indicators
- A mission that is related to economic growth
- A career pathways framework as a primary objective
- A roadmap spanning at least one year of activity
- An identified lead organization or leadership group
- A partnership consisting of representatives from a community college, local employers or industry, the Workforce Investment system, the K-12 education system, and adult education partners

Guide for Strategic Planning

Why should a pathways partnership devote the resources, time and money towards a strategic planning effort? Bringing together partners from various types of organizations and cultures—all from dynamic and demanding environments, to undergo this process can feel like an insurmountable task. The answer is that an effective strategic plan can ultimately save the partnership valuable resources, time and money by helping members gain consensus on and clearly articulate their priorities and stay focused on their establish goals.

A collaborative may want to consider the following keys to effective strategic planning:

- Stay focused on the *important* issues throughout the strategic planning process; inevitably, there are only a few key issues.
- Be open to examining old assumptions. Past priorities, processes and resource allocation may need to be reconsidered or challenged.
- Produce a written plan—it represents commitment, guides operations and benchmarks accomplishments and areas for improvement. It may also be used as a marketing tool for current and future partners or supporters.
- Outline at least one year operational plan with financial forecasts. Critical to the successful implementation is an operational plan that clearly articulates roles and responsibilities of members and partner organizations.

Recommended Phases in Strategic Planning:

There are many ways to approach the development of a strategic plan. A collaborative may consider the six-phase protocol and related activities described in this section.

Phase One: Planning to Plan

¹ Michael Allison and Jude Hayes, Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide and Workbook 2nd Edition, (San Francisco, California: CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, 2005); p. 1

To prepare for the strategic planning process, the partnership should perform the following tasks:

- Identify specific issues or decisions that the planning process should address
- Decide on the basics, including the roles and responsibilities in the process and who should participate
- Identify the key information that needs to be gathered to assist the partnership in making sound, informed decisions
- Clearly communicate the time, place and goals of the strategic planning meetings

Team members may want to have these resources available as they prepare to develop the strategic plan.

- Strategic Partnership for a Competitive Workforce Vision and Outcomes Statement (included in the Institute binder)
- Building a Competitive Workforce Through Career Pathways (included in the Institute binder)
- Economic and Gap analysis previously developed by the team
- Action Plans developed at the Institute
- Other planning documents the team has developed

Phase Two: Articulate Mission, Vision and Core Values Statements

Although phase two can be time-consuming, it is a key step in the strategic planning process. It requires collaboration and consensus from the partnership and, over time, must be revisited and sometimes challenged (see phase four). A partnership benefits from establishing its mission statement, vision and core value statements because it is the most succinct set of descriptors that communicate to the outside world the partnership's purpose and plan for the future. Below are guiding definitions and examples.

A **mission statement** is a short declaration of the partnership's core purpose. Often one or two sentences, the mission statement captures the underlying rationale for the existence of the partnership. Sometimes it is called an elevator speech or the "30-second pitch." It is the "Big Picture".

Example mission statement: *To sustain and ensure a competent and competitive (insert industry name...ex. health care) workforce using our collaborative strategies and resources.*

A **vision statement** is a future oriented description of what an organization wants to be, including its growth and renewal aspirations.

Example vision statement: *Development of an integrated education-to-practice model that will be replicated in other industry clusters ensuring the future (health) of our regional economy.*

A **core beliefs** statement describes the values on which a team or collaboration are built.

Example core beliefs statements:

The team will strive to understand and meet the interests of its members.

Preparing workers for a career path in high growth industries, such as health care or advanced manufacturing is the best way to secure a prosperous future for workers and our community.

The strategic plan will begin with these statements. Developing these statements is an early step in the strategic planning process.

Phase Three: Assess the Situation

Assessing a partnership's situation requires attention to data and other types of key information relevant to the team's priorities and goals. It is critical to be as thorough as possible during this phase because the outputs are only as good as the inputs. Simply said, the team will want to base its assumptions on sound information. Try and validate the information from more than one source, when possible. This will reduce the natural tendency to jump to conclusions as issues, problems, and questions emerge and are clarified. This phase results in a partnership—young or old—to assess or re-assess their situation and gain new awareness and insight into its internal and external context.

Tip:

The team may consider using a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to guide its members in developing the components of a strategic plan. A SWOT analysis is a broad overview of the most important internal and external opportunities and threats.

- *Strengths:* What are the Partnership's strengths? ("What does the Partnership do well?")
- *Weaknesses:* What are the Partnership's internal weaknesses? ("Where can the partnership improve?")
- *Opportunities:* What external opportunities exist with respect to pursuing the partnership's mission?
- *Threats:* What external threats might hinder the pursuit of the Partnership's mission?

Phase Four: Agree on Priorities

The next step is to identify and agree on concrete, measurable areas to focus the partnership's plan. It is during this phase that objectives, goals, strategies, outcomes and indicators emerge. Multiple methods can be employed to identify these areas—1)

individual brainstorming; 2) discussion among the group, or 3) facilitated decision-making techniques; however, in the end, is critical that the partnership is in agreement.

Teams are encouraged to consider the following definitions in developing their priorities and populating their strategic plan template.

Goals

Goals are project expectations set to obtain concrete and measurable results.

The goal of The Partnership Initiative, for example, is

“To support enhanced education outcomes through the development of comprehensive educational assets for workforce solutions that will ultimately contribute to local and regional economic growth, and to assure student success.”

The following goals were developed by teams at The Partnership Initiative Institute:

“Develop a PowerPoint presentation that communicates our message to potential partners and supports and includes our mission and vision.”

“Create a workforce development council within our state’s community college system.”

Objectives

An **objective** is the broadest statement of what an organization chooses to accomplish.

Most strategic plans contain between one and five objectives.

The objective of the Strategic Partnerships for a Competitive Workforce is:

“To inform, inspire, and support communities that are building comprehensive workforce and education solutions to meet the needs of their high-growth, high-demand industries and their local economies”

Here are two examples of objectives selected by SPCW teams:

“To augment the strategic partnerships of our collaboration by reaching out to key potential stakeholders and connecting to essential and complementary resources”

“Obtain feedback from the business community to develop our road map and validate our initial findings”

Strategies

Strategies are a set of actions to be undertaken to accomplish each goal contained in a strategic plan.

A career pathways team developed the following strategy at one of The Partnership Initiative Institutes:

“Create a “Presidents Meeting” that includes the CEOs of our major employers, leading public servants, college presidents, and community organizations to help champion our cause in the local economy.”

Outcomes

Outcomes are measurable results or effects of strategies or activities. Outcomes may be either direct or indirect. For example, , offering a series of short certificate programs which lead to a credential is one strategy which leads to improved access to training, which in turn leads to improved employment outcomes. The latter is an indirect outcome of the shorter certificates, while the former is a direct outcome. It is useful to distinguish between the two because often indirect outcomes are only realized after direct outcomes are realized.

Some of the team level outcomes The Partnership Initiative has identified are:

*Acquire new skills and knowledge
Expand and strengthen the partnership
Build capacity of strategic partners...
Outline a strategic plan*

A Partnership Institute team identified this outcome:

Train community members and place them into career track positions.

Indicators

Indicators are evidence or data that a certain condition exists or certain outcomes have or have not been achieved. Indicators can be quantitative or qualitative and enable decision-makers to assess progress towards the achievement of intended outcomes, goals, and objectives.

Using the second outcome above, examples of indicators that a team has expanded and strengthened their partnership might be:

*Number of placements increased from 6 to 50.
Available funds increased from 0 to \$5,000 to support early implementation.*

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) defining the partnership has been developed

Phase Five: Write the Strategic Plan

Among the stated outcomes for participating teams at The Partnership Initiative is the development of a strategic plan to help develop, implement, and expand career pathways models in high-growth industries. During Phase Four, teams began the strategic planning process by developing objectives, goals and a list of action items and tasks. The next step is to populate the strategic plan with specifics.

Phase Six: Budget Needs

Although, the overall direction set in the strategic plan will guide the acquisition and allocation of resources, and the human capital needed to sustain the work of the partnership; it is recommended that the partnership have some sense of its long-range financial projections and plans for sustainability. Such projections serve multiple purposes. They provide a clear picture of the costs required for implementation, but can also serve as a tool to recruit new members and supporters of the partnership who may bring needed resources to the table.

Suggested Strategic Planning Template

Strategic Plan

Name of the Team

Plan Period – two to three years

Team Name

List of team members and their affiliation.

Mission Statement

Vision Statement

Core Beliefs

Tip:

While the agencies do not condone plagiarism, gaining inspiration from the Mission, Vision, and Core Belief statements of other groups and organizations could help the team develop its own statements. Visit sites and read annual reports to get ideas and help trigger team members' thinking. Before choosing the final text, review the ideas with other stakeholders and revisit the team's draft language.

Stakeholders

List individuals, groups and organizations affected by this strategic plan. This may include low-wage, low-skilled workers, high school students and teachers, employers, elected officials, parents, economic development leaders, educators, workforce development community members, private foundations, the public sector, community-based and faith-based organizations, and other groups appropriate to the region.

Tip:

One suggestion for developing a list of stakeholders is to start with the team members' closest and most trusted associates in Business/Industry, Education/Training, and the Workforce system. They, in turn, should be able to suggest others in their networks to support, lead, or partner with the team's initiative.

Objectives, Goals, Strategies, Outcomes and Indicators

Identify the team's objective, providing information about goals, strategies, outcomes and indicators.

- Aim to identify between one and five objectives
- For each objective list three or four associated goals
- List three or four strategies or practices to achieve each goal . Some strategies may be pulled from the action plans developed during the Institute
- List the outcomes associated with each strategy (one or more)
- List the associated indicators for each outcome (one or more)

There are a number of ways to organize this information. Some groups will prefer to use an outline format, others prefer a tabular format. Two possible examples are provided below.

Example 1: Outline Format

Goal 1

Objective 1

Strategy 1

Outcome 1

Indicator 1

Indicator 2

Indicator 3

Outcome 2

Indicator 1

Indicator 2

Indicator 3

Strategy 2

Outcome 1

Indicator 1

Example 2: Tabular Format

Goal 1	Objective 1	Strategy 1	Outcome 1	Indicator 1
				Indicator 2
			Outcome 2	Indicator 1
				Indicator 2

Tip:

While the team's goal's tend to involve the larger picture focus and the objectives, strategies, outcomes, and indicators tend to involve more detail orientation, try not to get frustrated by these labels or the suggested outline - allow the team some flexibility in organizing its work.

Budget

Once key strategies have been identified, estimate any financial costs of implementing the strategy. The team should consider the costs of obtaining labor market information, planning the initiative, implementation and evaluation. Within those categories, the budget line items may include:

- Staffing
- Fringe
- Consulting services
- Space
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Tuition
- Books and Materials
- Marketing
- Travel
- Indirect Costs

Tip:

Once the team has identified the costs the group may want to think through available resources for underwriting the costs. To do so team members may want to consider the following questions:

- How are current programs and support services funded?
- Are there opportunities to generate income to support activities?
- What are the projected costs?
- What possible sources exist for this funding?
- How can the team access the needed resources?
- How much funding will be necessary to coordinate the work of the partners?

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