

Strategic Planning Guidance for System of Care Expansion

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“Effective system builders plan and implement strategically; that is, they are continually scanning the environment looking for opportunities—to generate interest, build constituencies, create buy-in, re-engineer financing streams, utilize existing structures, and the like. Being strategic is both a science and an art.” — SHEILA PIRES (2010), *BUILDING SYSTEMS OF CARE: A PRIMER*

Strategic planning is an agency’s or organization’s process or tool for defining its future direction or strategy and for making decisions about the allocation of resources to pursue that direction or strategy. There is no single, perfect model for strategic planning—the approach depends on the purpose of the planning, whether planning has been done before, the culture of the organization or agency, and the environment within which the planning occurs. However, this strategic planning guidance is intended to assist jurisdictions to develop *a strategic action plan that has broad consensus by many stakeholders and leads to concrete measurable change*. This plan will serve as the blueprint for expanding the system of care approach. This document provides guidance for developing a strategic plan for system of care expansion and is based on the approaches included in the following materials:

1. Pires, S. (2010). *Building Systems of Care: A Primer*. National Technical Assistance Center for Children’s Mental Health, Georgetown University.
2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2009). *Environmental Scan and Strategic Planning Guidance—A Reference Tool for Grantees* in Project LAUNCH Grant Program
3. Strahl, B., and Rider, F. *A Strategic Planning Template*, Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health, American Institutes for Research.
4. Stroul, B. A., and Friedman, R. M. (2011). *Effective strategies for expanding the system of care approach. A report on the study of strategies for expanding systems of care*. Atlanta, GA: ICF Macro
5. Dodge, J. *Action Planning Templates*. Georgetown University Policy Academies, National Technical Assistance Center for Children’s Mental Health.

This guidance addresses three major areas to consider in the strategic planning process: 1) constituency building and engaging partners, 2) planning strategically, and 3) sustaining and expanding systems of care using five core system change strategies and sub-strategies.

Constituency Building and Engaging Partners

Creating a comprehensive strategic plan is dependent on creating a core group or team that comes from the various constituencies that are committed to and interested in system of care expansion efforts. Pires, in her *Building a System of Care: A Primer* (2010), associates the effectiveness of a core leadership team with “the five C’s” of Constituency (or representativeness), Credibility, Capacity, Commitment, and Consistency (p. 241). Time and thought should be invested in choosing the members of the core expansion planning team, as that group will be responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the plan, from its shared overall vision to its many action steps. A larger constituency group of stakeholders should be created, beyond the core leadership group, to also participate in developing and supporting the strategic plan.

Effective collaboration is essential to success, beginning with agreement across all key constituencies on a shared vision and direction as the foundation for the strategic plan. State and local teams should be collaborating from the beginning of the process with representatives of child-serving agencies, and families

and youth. Pires offers the following principles for collaboration: agreeing on essential values, focusing on common goals, developing a common language, respecting the knowledge and experience of each person, assuming the best intention of the partners, and honoring all voices (p. 244).

The designated leaders responsible for creating a strategic expansion plan (including a complementary social marketing or strategic communications plan) will be responsible for handling both the process of establishing/supporting/strengthening collaboration among the various constituency groups, as well as the actual planning and production (writing) of the final products. *The processes of collaboration and consensus development can be as important to the success of the strategic plan as the final products that are created.*

Planning Strategically

A comprehensive strategic action plan that is both short-term and long-term in scope should be informed by an assessment of the environment or context, e.g., through use of a SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, threat) analysis and a self-assessment tool. Such an environmental analysis provides a basis for creating a logic model that is an important component of the strategic plan. The logic model becomes, ideally, a one-page visual representation of a planning entity's intent, including the population of focus, a theory of change, and desired short- and long-term outcomes.

While many strategic planning processes are imagined as linear, the reality is often not that simple. The planning process may follow a unique sequence, depending on previous planning efforts, and even on the culture of the planning group itself. Project LAUNCH, which focused on early childhood, outlined steps in the strategic planning process for its grantees (SAMHSA, 2009, p. 25). While the language used for Project LAUNCH grantees is somewhat different from that of the system of care expansion planning, the major steps are relevant for creating both a logic model and a strategic plan:

- Engage stakeholders
- Gather existing information to inform the process
- Conduct a strategic analysis of the environmental scan
- Review and refine vision, values, goals, and objectives
- Refine the logic model including outcomes and indicators
- Develop and refine program and policy strategies
- Plan financing and sustainability
- Identify tasks and move forward

The development of a logic model is an important component of the creation of a strategic plan. The logic model defines critical areas that must be included as part of the strategic planning process, as it depicts the theory behind the intervention. It specifies the problem that will be addressed, the activities that will be undertaken, and the intended outcomes to be achieved based on the interventions to be implemented. Two key components of a logic model are: 1) articulation of a *clear population of focus*, and 2) *a set of short- and long-term outcomes*.

According to Pires (2010), “Developing a clear population of focus does not mean that one must adopt either a narrow or a broad population focus. Either is possible, or something in between. What it does mean is that system builders need to agree upon and articulate who the children and families are for whom the system is being built—from among or including all of the total population of children and families who depend on public systems for services and supports” (p. 267). That step is consequential. Furthermore, “every decision that system builders make about who is included carries implications for the types of strategies that need to be developed” (p. 268).

Outcomes represent results of implementation and are expressed as changes in a person’s (or a population’s (e.g., families, children, adolescents) knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, values, and/or life conditions. Words such as increase or decrease are often used with outcomes. Long-term outcomes are often systemic changes over time and are the flipside or intended results of articulated goals. It is sometimes easier for a group to say what it wants to increase or decrease than to create a broad goal from scratch. Articulation of both the population of focus and intended outcomes are integral parts of a logic model and should be reviewed (refined, updated) as strategic planning proceeds. “The process of establishing shared outcomes,” Pires writes, “is one of finding common ground and purpose across diverse stakeholder groups. It is a process guided by values and vision and an understanding of the needs and strengths of the identified population” (p. 272).

As mentioned, there is no single, perfect strategic plan format. However, most plans have a set of common fundamental elements. It is also important to remember that *strategic plans are meant to be modified in a continual process of quality monitoring and improvement as implementation proceeds*. The following description outlines some of the fundamental elements that might be included in the strategic plan, allowing for appropriate variation to occur for different jurisdictions. Most strategic plans are for a 3-year period, with much of the detail work reflected in the first full year of implementation. Periodically during the first implementation year, the plan is reviewed by the team, accomplishments are celebrated, and ongoing and incomplete tasks are moved into the second implementation year along with a clear set of year 2 goals. A plan always continues to move forward, checking off what has been completed, and adding goals and actions that become evident and decided by the group. A 3-year plan should get the initiative at least half the way to realizing a five year vision (Strahl & Rider, 2011).

Key components of a strategic plan include:

- **Establish a shared vision statement**—This statement is the dream, the big idea, “out there” five years into the future—attainable, but reachable only by stretching. It should be a “widely held” or a “shared” vision, developed and agreed upon by as many people as possible, and is exciting, brief, and interesting.
- **Identify purpose (mission statement)**—This statement describes why the system of care exists or should exist—its essential purpose. The statement may change somewhat over the years. The mission statement tells what the system of care is and its purpose. It is simple, short, and current, and it proclaims what the system of care is about. A great mission statement will explain your work in terms that a child could understand.
- **Identify values and principles**—Values are what we believe and how we behave. Values and principles are *foundational* for ongoing system development. The system of care approach is largely defined by its strong value base captured in these concepts: family driven and youth guided, individualized and strengths based, culturally and linguistically competent, data driven and outcomes oriented, and collaborative across child-serving systems.
- **Select broad goals (outcomes) to effectively work toward the mission and achieve the vision**—Goals are the “big chunks” or broad statements of what must be accomplished to realize the vision that the initiative or program intends to accomplish. They can be written to include the intended outcome as part of the goal statement. Some goals will need to be completed first before other goals, so they must be addressed in initial actions. Additional goals that may naturally follow or that may be less urgent can be acted on in later years. Some goals may be short-term goals, accomplished easily within a year; others must be longer term and may take a number of years to achieve. It may be advisable to include in the strategic plan a goal that is an easy win or “low hanging fruit” in order to demonstrate early success.
- **Identify specific core strategies and sub-strategies which should be implemented to reach the broad goals or outcomes**—A strategy is a chosen direction. Strategies can be considered as the major directions chosen in the quest toward the mission and goal fulfillment. When choosing strategies, it is important to identify

ones that lead to *fundamental change in the system*. Although there may be a number of worthwhile strategies, they might not lead to the kind of systemic changes desired by the jurisdiction that is involved in the planning process (Pires, 2010, p. 284). A strategy must be articulated to others. That is, in addition to establishing a course for the future, one must attract others to come “on board for the ride.”

Recent research in system development resulted in a strategic framework for system of care expansion comprised of five core strategies and multiple sub-strategies under each core strategy that are effective for sustaining and expanding systems of care for children, youth, and young adults with behavioral health challenges and their families (Stroul, B. A., & Friedman, R. M., 2011). These include: 1) Implementing policy, regulatory, and partnership changes, 2) Developing or expanding services and supports based on system of care philosophy and approach, 3) Creating and improving financing strategies, 4) Providing training, technical assistance, and workforce development, and 5) Generating support for system of care expansion through strategic communications. Once goals are identified, it is necessary to identify the core strategies and sub-strategies needed to achieve each goal. Identifying the major strategies and sub-strategies needed to achieve each goal can organize the overall plan and prepare for identifying action steps.

- **Identify specific action steps to implement each strategy**—These are the action steps to accomplish the goals. Each action step should have a completion date and list the person responsible for seeing it is accomplished. (That person is not necessarily responsible for doing all the work, but instead is the point person and at least coordinates the efforts of those working on the action toward completion.)
- **Compile the vision, mission, values, strategies, goals, and action steps into a strategic action plan document**—Ensure that the various constituencies and partners that have participated in the planning process recognize their contributions in the plan.
- **Monitor implementation of the strategic plan and update the plan as needed**—System builders must regularly reflect on the extent to which goals are being met and whether action steps are being implemented. The strategic plan with its shared goals, strategies, and action steps becomes the ongoing work of the team and its workgroups as it is being monitored and updated periodically.

Expanding Systems of Care Based on Five Core Strategy Areas

In summary, creating a strategic plan involves developing consensus among key constituents on a shared vision, shared values, and shared goals and outcomes, and then applying specific core strategies/sub-strategies and action steps needed to carry them out. The resultant strategic plan will become a reliable blueprint to ensure the multi-level changes needed to accomplish successful system reform to expand the system of care approach.