How To | Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the process of envisioning a desired future and translating the vision into reality by defining the necessary steps.

Strategic planning helps to develop ownership of a coalition, use resources effectively by focusing on key priorities, and provide a method to measure progress for prevention[4]. There are many approaches to strategic planning, and various approaches may utilize different steps and terminology for their purposes. This model will utilize the following 6 steps: 1) establish the mission and vision, 2) conduct a needs assessment and environmental scan, 3) establish goals/objectives, 4) identify evidence-based strategies to achieve the goals, 5) create a strategic plan with action steps to implement strategies 6) and evaluate the plan and use the results for improvement.

Key Components of Prevention

Prevention should be a process that is balanced, comprehensive, evidence-informed, evaluated, and a shared responsibility. Balanced prevention involves addressing the campus health and safety issues of all students, not just high-risk or non-users of alcohol and other drugs. Prevention should also focus on the diverse health and safety issues that affect student well-being, not just on alcohol use. Comprehensive prevention involves implementing a variety of prevention strategies, which should address individual behaviors as well as the environment of the campus community. For example, just educating students about alcohol and expecting that knowledge to change behavior is not a comprehensive prevention approach. The social ecological model in figure 1 highlights the work that can be done at each level to create comprehensive prevention. Evidence shows that interventions are more effective when implemented at multiple levels of the social ecological model and reinforce one another[3].

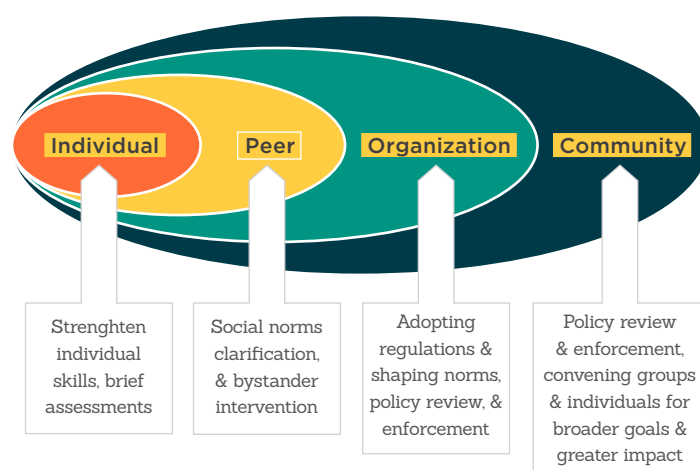| Individual	Peer	Organization	Community
Strenghten individual skills, brief assessments	Social norms clarification, & bystander intervention	Adopting regulations & shaping norms, policy review, & enforcement	Policy review & enforcement, convening groups & individuals for broader goals & greater impact

Figure 1

Evidence-informed prevention means choosing strategies and programs that have evidence of

effectiveness in public health or campus health literature. Campuses should not implement strategies that are proven to be ineffective in the literature. Campuses should implement a prevention plan and evaluate that prevention plan, using the annual Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors survey and other assessment tools. Evaluation is a key component of effective prevention to determine what the outcomes of prevention efforts are and to ensure that efforts are being implemented as planned[3]. Finally, the promotion of college health, safety, and well-being is a shared responsibility. This responsibility is shared between the individual student and their college environment. Additionally the responsibility for implementing prevention strategies is shared between all members of the higher education institution.

Establishing the Mission and Vision

Mission and vision statements help define the purpose of a coalition, what it stands for, and what it hopes to achieve. The vision is an aspirational statement of what an organization wants to be in the future. Vision statements describe a direction and goal. The mission is the stated purpose for an organization's existence and the contributions it promises to make to help accomplish the vision. Mission statements describe what an organization does. Input from key stakeholders and coalition members will be crucial for this step and creates a shared understanding that will inform the next steps of the strategic plan.[2]

Conducting a Needs Assessment and Environmental Scan

An environmental scan is a process that evaluates internal and external factors that impact a coalition. Often this is in the form of a "SWOC" analysis that examines the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **C**hallenges to a coalition.

Strengths and weaknesses involve internal factors, while opportunities and challenges involve external factors. Environmental scanning contributes to the strategic planning and decision making process by identifying characteristics of your coalition that may hinder or help the set goals.

A needs assessment is used to thoroughly understand the issues impacting campus and the community that will be addressed in the final strategic plan. There are 3 steps to a needs assessment, 1) assess the nature and scope of the problem on campus and in the community, 2) examine available assets and resources in the campus community to further your prevention efforts, and 3) analyze the information to clarify needs and opportunities for prevention.[1] A more thorough explanation of this process can be found in our "How To brief on Needs Assessments", which is adapted from the paper "Problem Analysis: The First Step in Prevention Planning" by William DeJong, Ph.D.

Establish Goals and Objectives

The needs assessment will inform the goals and objectives set by the coalition. What initiatives will target the largest problems, utilize existing resources, and be enhanced by your strengths? Goals should aim to create changes in student behavior and achieve outcomes using evidence-based strategies. Goals that are too vague can be left open to interpretation and can create problems when selecting strategies. Thus, precisely written goals often assist in the best outcomes. Aim to create goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, and Realistic within the given Time frame, often referred to as SMART goals.[3] Further parse out these goals by setting related objectives that will address the factors that contribute to the problems identified in the needs assessment.[3] While it is likely that there are many problems on campus that need to be addressed,

trying to solve them all will spread resources too thin and lessen the impact of chosen strategies. Try to focus on a few key problems that can be targeted with a variety of strategies to create effective and widespread change.

Identify Evidence-Based Strategies to Achieve Goals

Evidence-based strategies are those that are derived from objective evidence indicating effectiveness. While it can be daunting to go through research and identify evidence-based programs, it may be necessary for newer interventions; however, there are many existing compilations of evidence-based practices for prevention. The College AIM is a resource for selecting evidence-based strategies regarding alcohol use. SAMHSA's NREPP (National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices) is another database resource for evidence-based strategies. Many other online resources for prevention highlight effective approaches. These are listed in the "resources" section below, as well as on the PIP website under the "prevention toolbox" section by topic.

Choose strategies that will target your goals and related problems by influencing individual behaviors, group behaviors, the campus environment, and the community environment. This can be visualized by creating a strategic intervention matrix (example shown in our "How To brief on Needs Assessments"). Multiple strategies should be selected for each goal to create a balanced and comprehensive approach for prevention.

Create a Strategic Plan with Action Steps

Now it is time to write out your strategic plan; include all the above components but leave out the needs assessment and environmental scan. Format the plan to your personal preference, but it may be helpful to state the identified problem and the objectives with evidence-based strategies to achieve the goal. Some coalitions also find it helpful to list which individual, entity, or department will be responsible for completing each strategy. It is also recommended to include data from the MACHB in a table or chart to show trend data over time, or to compare year to year. The strategic plan can be in any format you wish
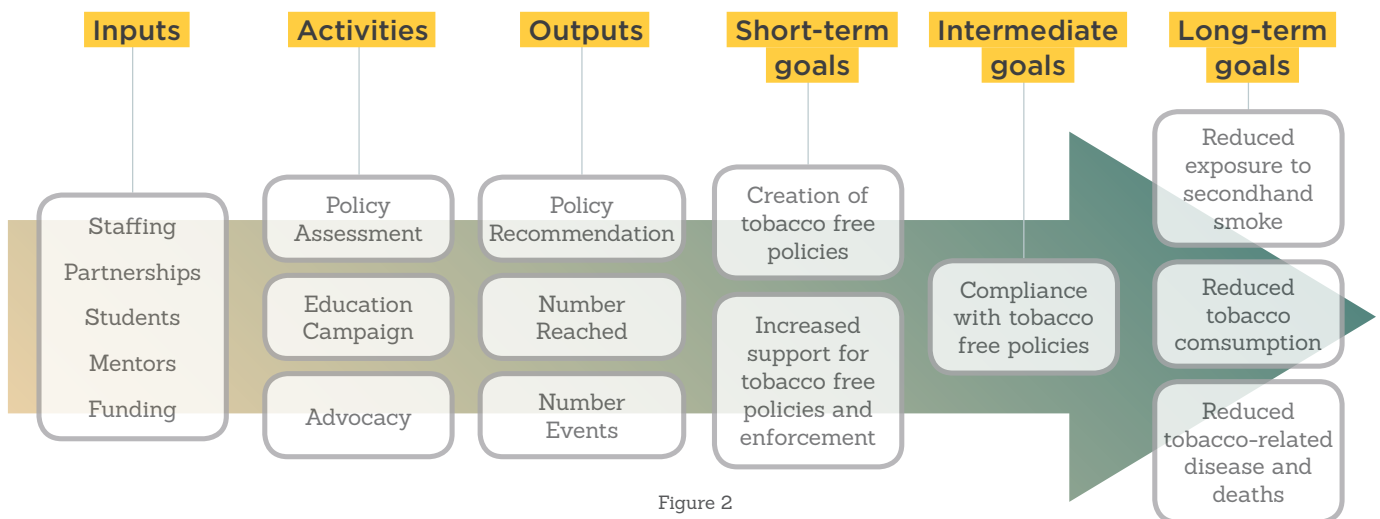

Logic model for tobacco prevention plan

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term goals	Intermediate goals	Long-term goals
Staffing Partnerships Students Mentors Funding	Policy Assessment	Policy Recommendation	Creation of tobacco free policies	Compliance with tobacco free policies	Reduced exposure to secondhand smoke
	Education Campaign	Number Reached	Increased support for tobacco free policies and enforcement		Reduced tobacco comsumption
	Advocacy	Number Events			Reduced tobacco-related disease and deaths

Figure 2

and should work best for you based on your coalition needs. During this step it may be helpful to construct a diagram that outlines a chain of events from the intervention to the desired outcomes called a logic model. During this step it may be helpful to construct a diagram that outlines a chain of events from the intervention to the desired outcomes, called a logic model (shown in figure 2).

Evaluate the Plan

Once you have initiated the strategic plan, you can begin to evaluate whether the interventions are being implemented as planned and causing the desired outcomes. There are 3 types of evaluation that can assist in this step: process evaluation (what are we doing?), outcome evaluation (what is each activity accomplishing?) and impact evaluation (what effects are we producing?).[3] While the data from the MACHB will give you an overall picture of changes on campus related to specific issues, remember that it is important to evaluate individual action steps as well. For example, if you are implementing peer education as an action step to educate about reducing high-risk alcohol use, what specific evaluations of peer education will determine if that intervention is effective? Each action step may not be easily evaluated, but try to plan for some type of evaluation or measurement as you create them.

Conclusion

Strategic planning is an ongoing process that does not end when the plan is written. The graphic to the right can help you visualize how each step of planning relates to another and to remember that planning should create a constant feedback loop. Referring back to the strategic plan periodically will help remind the coalition of goals it still needs to work on, as well as action steps that have been accomplished. Think of the strategic plan as a living document that can be updated as the year progresses with data, notes, and anything else that may prove helpful for the next year. Remember that prevention on college campuses is no small task, and that strategic planning can help make it more manageable.
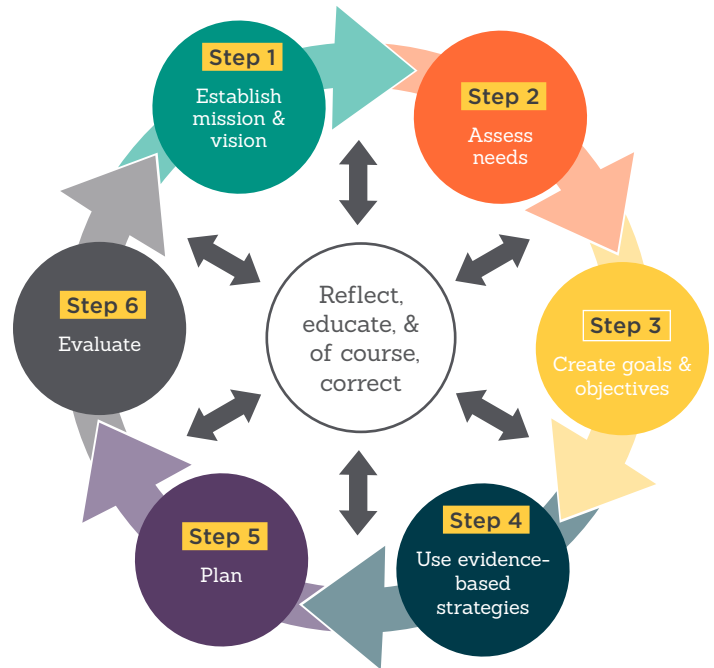

Figure 3

Resources

[The College AIM](#)

[SAMHSA's NREPP](#)

[Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) Resources and Programs](#)

[National Social Norms Center](#)

[Stop SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence](#)

1.DeJong, W. (2009). Problem Analysis: The First Step in Prevention Planning. The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention.

2.Gantz McKay, E. (2001). Strategic Planning: A Ten-Step Guide. MOSAICA.

3.Langford, L., DeJong, W. (2009). Strategic Planning for Prevention Professionals on Campus. The Higher Education Center for Alcohl and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention.

4.McNamara, C. (2018). Understanding Strategic Planning. Free Management Library.