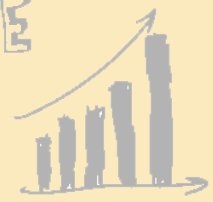
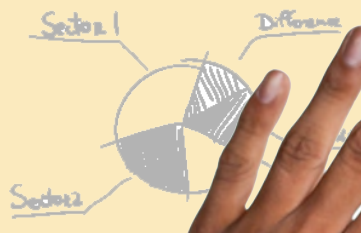
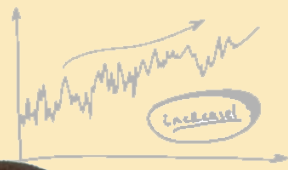
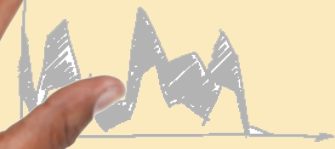




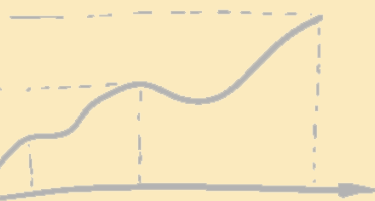
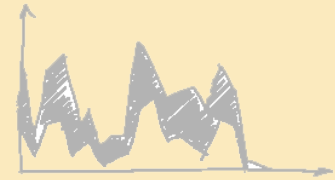
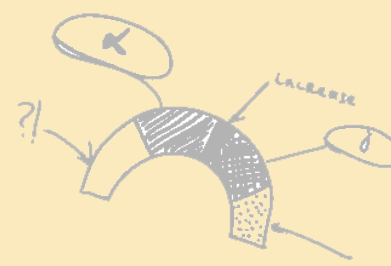
SCHEME



Element



Peak!





topic 1

nuts and bolts of strategic planning



Getting Started

When planning a trip, you typically begin by identifying where you are headed and then determine the best route to get there. A Head Start program's strategic planning effort also begins by setting a direction. Programs examine relevant program and community data and ask dialogue-generating questions to clarify the direction to take towards strategic goals. With the Head Start planning cycle as their guide, programs can purposefully pursue goals to transform their vision into reality for enrolled children and their families.

Whether you are new to Head Start or updating your knowledge of program planning best practices, consider reading through this topic to extend your understanding of program goals, measurable objectives, expected outcomes, and action plans. This topic also explores the importance of identifying expected challenges.



Learning Objectives

Programs understand each of the planning elements in the context of Head Start's planning cycle. Learn how they collectively contribute to successful programming, strategic program goals, and ultimately, positive outcomes for children, their families, and communities. Additionally, programs can recognize how planning elements, and the process in its entirety, offer a critical platform for identifying challenges to a program's progress.

topic 1: nuts and bolts of strategic planning

The terms *goals*, *objectives*, *outcomes*, *action plans*, and *challenges* are widely used in the research, evaluation, education, and business communities. The purpose of Topic 1 is to define these terms in the context of Head Start.

These terms and definitions are key to strategic planning and are fundamental to the Head Start grant application process. Both the HSPPS and the Head Start Grant Application Instructions highlight key terminology. Consider how these terms are integral to the program planning cycle.

Terms and Definitions

Program Goals – Broad statements that describe what a program intends to accomplish. Program goals should be strategic, long term, and responsive to the needs identified in the community assessment. They include:

- Goals for the provision of educational, health, nutritional, and family and community engagement program services to further promote the school readiness of enrolled children;
- School readiness goals; and
- Effective health and safety practices to ensure children are safe at all times (programs may wish to identify these as a stand-alone goal or as an objective related to another type of program goal, i.e. a health goal).

School Readiness Goals – The expectations of children's status and progress across domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve their readiness for kindergarten (as defined in [45 CFR 1305.2](#)).

Measurable Objectives – Support the attainment of goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely (SMART).

Progress – Forward movement toward the achievement of goals, objectives, and outcomes.

Outcomes – Something that happened as a result of an activity or process. The actual results achieved.

Challenges – Information describing obstacles to achieving program goals and objectives.

Evidence – Facts, information, documentation, or examples given to support an assertion.

▶ Page 7 of the Head Start Grant Application Instructions (2017–2018) highlights key terms and definitions.

Tell Me More! ▶

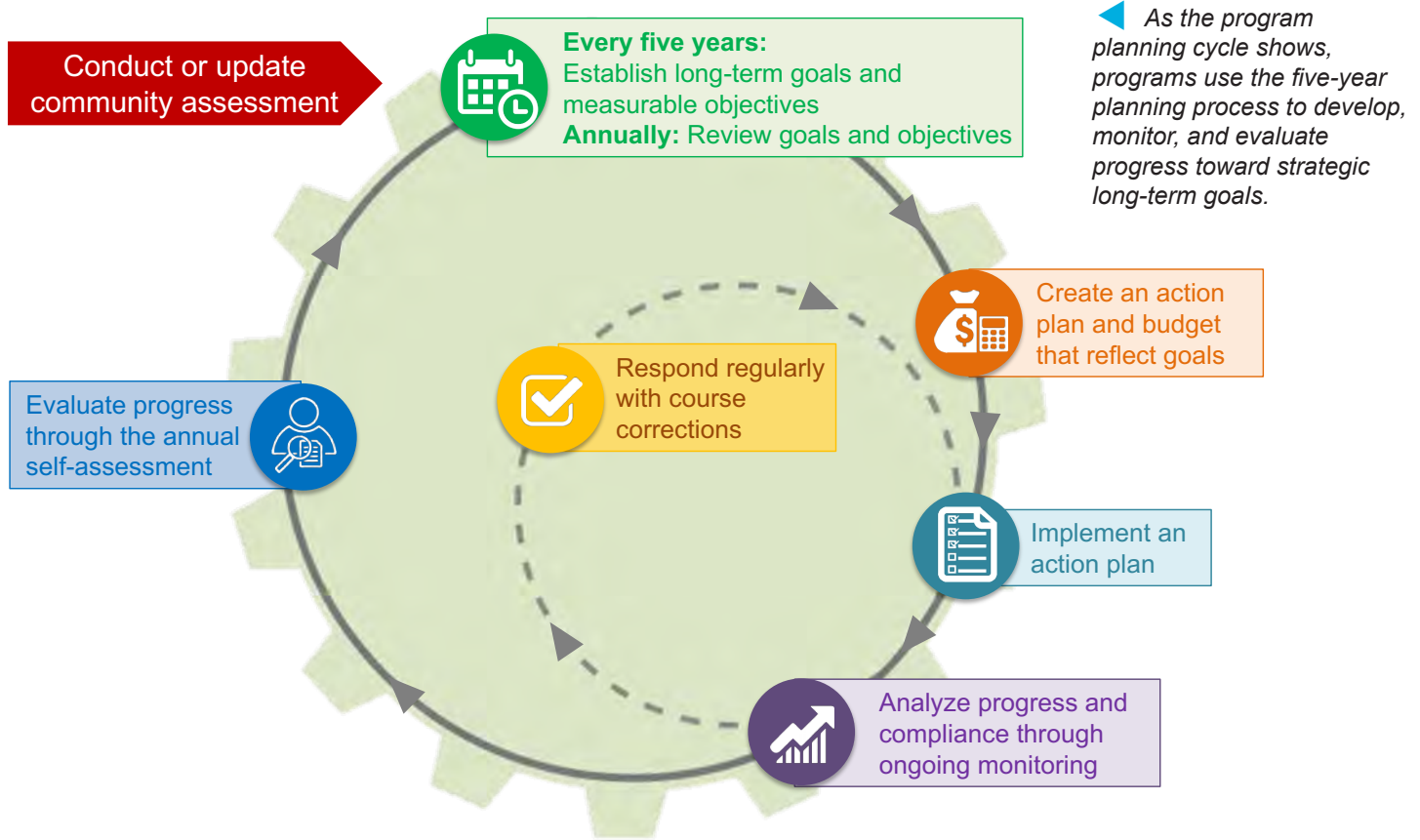
The Head Start resource Five Steps to Community Assessment guides the development of responsive community assessments.

Effective Head Start¹ programs engage in a cyclical planning process. Prior to the first year of the five-year project period, the program's planning team determines strategic goals that are informed by data and findings from the community assessment, annual self-assessment, and related child, family, and community data. These strategic goals set the course for continuous improvement and innovation. New programs that have not yet conducted an annual self-assessment can use the community assessment to develop long-term goals.

Equipped with this wealth of information, your planning team can affirm or revise the program goals and objectives, keeping in mind that program goals should remain the same wherever possible so it is easier to track progress over time. You may find that some objectives have been accomplished over the course of the year, and now the recommendations of the self-assessment team lead to new objectives, along with next steps to move toward the goal.

As part of the baseline application, you will identify expected outcomes and document expected challenges. This process is valuable in encouraging your team to adopt a more critical, thorough, and big-picture perspective. And, in turn, having a more comprehensive perspective will lessen the likelihood that your program will need to change goals. ■

? How is the program planning cycle used in your program?



What Is a Program Goal?

You have probably heard the expression “keep your eyes on the prize.” The program goals are “the prize”—broad statements that describe what a program intends to accomplish. Each Head Start program’s long-term goals provide a framework for the program’s mission, including priorities related to education, nutrition, health, and parent and family engagement program services. Program goals are strategic and long-term. They may also support comprehensive approaches that encourage system-wide cultural and linguistic responsiveness. In addition, they include school readiness goals, a distinct set of goals focused specifically on child development and early learning outcomes in each of the five central developmental domains.

Keep in mind the acronym “**BROAD**” as you write your goals: **B**old, **R**esponsive, **O**rganization-wide, **A**spirational, and **D**ynamic. These goals give voice to the shared vision within your program and help everyone (staff, governing body/Tribal Council and Policy Council members) focus on priorities. In Head Start, programs review their goals based on findings from the community assessment, annual self-assessment, and related child, family, and community data.



Definition

School readiness goals as defined by the HSPPS 45 CFR § 1305, are the expectations of children’s status and progress across domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve their readiness for kindergarten. School readiness goals are a type of program goal. See Topics 3 and 4 for additional discussion on school readiness goals.

BROAD:
Bold
Responsive
Organization-wide
Aspirational
Dynamic

Tips for Setting BROAD Goals

Bold



Think big; really big. Dare yourself to reach for the stars as you set goals.

Imagine! Where would you like your program to be at the end of five years? What do you expect to accomplish? What will your program's legacy be to the children, families, and communities you serve?

Go beyond compliance. Think about both innovation and compliance as you set your goals. What exciting community-driven initiatives would you like your program to accomplish over the next five years?

Continuously improve. Generate goals that will help your program not only meet the HSPPS but strengthen, strive, and innovate for more effective services for children and families.

Responsive



Look to the future. BROAD goals aren't accomplished overnight. Most are written to be accomplished during the five-year project period. In most cases, goals stay the same, so you can measure progress and impact over the five-year project period. BROAD goals tend to be more long-term. Program objectives and related strategies are likely to change from year to year.

Use data to determine your goals. Goals should not be a rewritten regulation or standard. They are developed based on data and the critical needs that emerge for children, families, and the community. Use the community assessment, results from your annual self-assessment process, and other program-specific data sources to develop, prioritize, and refine the program goals. You may have other program-specific data sources that also provide critical insight.

Include families. Look for opportunities to listen, learn, and collect data from parents and family members. Focus groups and surveys are important ways to obtain feedback from families, but be sure to explore different ways to connect that are meaningful for diverse populations. The family partnership agreement process is an important source of data about families' needs, interests, and priorities.

Engage program leadership. The HSPPS require that you establish program goals "in collaboration with the governing body/Tribal Council and Policy Council." Provide decision-makers with the data they need to meaningfully participate in this process.

Explore. Exploring related research could help as you develop program goals. Take advantage of the multitude of resources on Head Start's website, the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), as well as MyPeers forums.



Organization-wide

Consider how program and school readiness goals work together. Aligned goals are likely to produce more effective results. Also, as you develop your organizational goals, take into account both the demographic changes in your community as well as how diverse populations are changing.

Involve all levels of the organization. Program goals require commitment from many stakeholders including governing body/Tribal Council and Policy Council members and families. The goal of improving attendance is an example of an organization-wide goal. Everyone from bus drivers and teachers, to center directors, Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) staff, family service and health staff, and, most importantly, families themselves, can have an important role to play in helping a program reduce absenteeism.

Aspirational



Motivate by engaging emotions. Change is more likely to happen when goals speak to the heart as well as the head.

Write with intention. One of the keys to successful goal-setting is to motivate and inspire. Consider starting your program goal statement with inclusive words, such as, “In our Head Start program, we will...”

Dynamic



Dynamic is defined as “energetic or forceful.” In the video, *Goals – Four Disciplines of Execution*, Stephen Covey invites us to consider the energy and creativity that are unleashed when everyone in the organization is committed and involved in achieving shared goals.² ■

Beware if your goals are too:

Vague	“The program will continue to learn.”
Narrow	“All managers will get their masters’ degree.”
Broad	“All families will become self-sufficient.”
Generic	They simply restate regulations.
Many	Programs can’t track progress.



Management system, 45 CFR § 1302.101(b) affirms the need for organization-wide coordinated approaches: “At the beginning of each program year, and on an ongoing basis throughout the year, a program must design and implement program-wide coordinated approaches.” When you adopt an organization-wide focus, you are also reinforcing the message that everyone plays a critical role in helping the program achieve its goals.”



How do you engage stakeholders in establishing BROAD goals?

SMART:
Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Realistic
Timely

! *Goals keep your eyes on the prize. Objectives help you hit the nail on the head.*

► *This Venn diagram shows the similarities and differences between goals and objectives.*

What Is an Objective?

Objectives expand on the goal by identifying the tasks that will need to be accomplished. Objectives quantify the services that will be delivered within a given period of time. They are written as actions to be accomplished. Use the acronym **SMART** to define the action as **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, and **T**imely. If goals are your destination, measurable objectives are your mile markers along the way.

Tips for Developing Measurable Objectives

Where the goal is a **BROAD** statement of what your program expects to accomplish, an objective describes a specific action or result to be achieved. One goal is likely to have several objectives.

Be careful to distinguish between objectives and action steps. Think of objectives as your yardstick. Objectives enable you to measure and stay alert as you make incremental progress toward your goal. While the objective is a statement of what a program wants to achieve, it is not yet a statement of how the program will get there. How you get there, the action plan, is built on a series of specific action steps.

Consider including financial objectives as well as program objectives. Goals often require a commitment of resources. Financial objectives ensure that the program is financially committed to its goals.

Your budget is a numerical expression of your program's goals and objectives. A financial objective may be represented in your program budget and budget narrative, and it can appear as the designated and secured source of financing that will support your action plan. If it requires money, even the best plan will not happen if that money is not available. Programs can also establish independent fiscal goals such as decreasing staff turnover by increasing pay of classroom teachers. This is a separate goal and not simply an objective within the scope of an existing goal.



What Is an Outcome and an Expected Outcome?

If a goal tells you where you're headed, an outcome tells you the result of your actions. Very simply, outcomes are the results achieved, like making progress toward the achievement of a school readiness goal.

The Head Start Grant Application Instructions ask programs to forecast expected outcomes in their initial baseline application. For example, the family engagement outcomes in the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework include expected outcomes. Programs may create a program-wide goal of improving the financial stability of their families (e.g., PFCE Expected Outcome: Family Well-being), but they may have several objectives to support this goal. In the end, what they would expect to see is an outcome of improved financial stability for the majority of their families.

Think of expected outcomes as your program's hoped-for results for children, families, and the community. Frame your outcomes to answer this question: "What results do we want?"

Expected outcomes relate directly to program goals and objectives. What do you expect to achieve as a result of meeting your objectives? For example, if an agency sets a program goal of developing and maintaining an exemplary system of program governance, a related objective may be that the management team provides the governing body/Tribal Council with accurate fiscal information on a monthly basis. The expected outcome that could arise from this goal and objective might be "governing body/Tribal Council members fully understand and effectively use all fiscal information on which to make sound programmatic decisions."

Just as one goal might have several objectives, it is important to identify all the expected outcomes you hope to see for a particular goal and set of objectives. By implementing and monitoring your action plan, you will be able to determine whether you are meeting your objectives and making progress towards achieving your outcomes.

What Is Meant by Progress?

While progress is defined as forward movement toward achieving goals, objectives, and expected outcomes, it is not necessarily a steady, consistent climb. Because your program must rely on program data to demonstrate to what extent positive change has occurred, you also need to know where you started. This starting point, also referred to as "baseline data," is necessary for comparative purposes. Baseline data makes it possible to track and report progress in each yearly continuation application and throughout the five-year project period.

Tips for Tracking Progress

Identify which data will enable you to assess how you are doing. To be able to report on progress, programs need to first define what changes to measure, along with the data sources to be used for measuring that change. Begin with existing program data that you know to be reliable and relevant.



Outcomes are actual results. Expected outcomes are forecasted results.



Definition

Baseline data

is the starting point at which information is gathered. It is used for comparative purposes to track and report progress in the annual continuation application and over the five-year project period.

topic 1: nuts and bolts of strategic planning

Integrate methods for tracking and analyzing progress into the program’s ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement system. You already collect data throughout the year through your ongoing monitoring efforts. As you analyze that data, consider the following questions:




- Are we doing what we said we would do?
- How well are we doing it?
- Do we need to adjust our action plan?

Consider contacting knowledgeable evaluators—nonprofit resource centers and universities—to help select the right data tools and methods for tracking progress toward identified objectives and expected outcomes. Analyzing data can be simple or complex. As you build your program’s analytic capacity, consider the value of asking the right questions. Michael Marquardt, author of *Leading with Questions*³, writes about “great questions.” He suggests that great questions are selfless and support the work of the group by:

- Creating deep reflection
- Testing assumptions and encouraging individuals to explore their thoughts
- Enabling the group to better view the situation
- Opening doors to the mind
- Leading to breakthrough thinking

Using data for continuous improvement plays a significant role in the five-year project period. However, avoid being “data rich and information poor.” Always consider available data during strategic planning. For example, three methods of tracking progress for a measurable objective may be too many. If the findings from two measures are redundant consider discontinuing one of them.

Examples of Data Sources for Tracking Progress

 Children	 Families	 Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child files • Standardized and structured child assessments • Informal teacher observations, child portfolios, etc. • Daily health checks • Individual attendance records • Well-child data • Kindergarten entry assessments from receiving schools • Parent feedback • Developmentally standardized screenings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent surveys • Family partnership process • Family assessments • PFCE Markers of Progress • Depression screeners • Parenting intervention tools • Tools for family strength-based assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual self-assessment • Community assessment • Aggregated child-level assessment data • Aggregated family progress data • Quality Rating Improvement Systems (if appropriate) • Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) • Health Services Advisory Committee • Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) • Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS)

Go beyond measures that simply count the number of things offered in a program or your effort. Consider the effect of your actions and explore ways to measure the impact of your efforts. Although counting is important—especially when it captures the number of parents who showed up for an event, for example, or the number of evening classes offered—going beyond counting is even more important. For example, can you show how your efforts supported parents in earning their GED or pursuing vocational training? Now, you start getting at the actual effect of your work. ■

Indicators of a Culture of Continuous Improvement

While people have long appreciated the merits of incrementally improving processes, the phrase “continuous improvement” was formalized in the 1980s. No matter the industry or business, a system of continuous improvement is necessary to make the most of your efforts and services. Consider these indicators as you cultivate your culture of continuous improvement.

- **Curiosity:** Ask how and why questions. Are staff actively asking questions and thinking critically?
- **Reflection:** Review program policies and seek regular feedback. Is time and space provided to look at data for meaning and insight?
- **Tolerance for vulnerability:** Recognize and discuss when things aren’t working well. Are staff comfortable making course corrections?
- **Value feedback:** Use data to assess if strategies are making a difference. Do we have a listening culture?
- **Systems thinking:** Take a 10,000-foot view to gain a broader more comprehensive perspective. Does staff appreciate where their Head Start program fits within the larger community and the lives of the children they serve?

What Is Meant by Challenges?

Challenges come in all forms and levels of difficulty. Pat Lynch, president of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc., contends that to successfully address challenges, groups must view them through a big picture lens while focusing on outcome or impact.⁴ The Head Start Grant Application Instructions describe challenges as obstacles to achieving the program goals and objectives. Thus, in the baseline application, expected challenges are those that programs expect to come across as they move forward to achieve program goals and objectives. In the continuation application, programs are also asked to describe the actual challenges to achieving the program goals and objectives. The continuation application also requires that you discuss how your program is working to address the challenges.



How do your objectives measure program success?

Connecting the Steps

Program goal:

Maintain an exemplary system of program governance.

Fiscal objective:

The management team provides the governing body/Tribal Council with accurate fiscal information on a monthly basis.

Action step:

Monthly program expenditure reports are prepared and submitted for review to the governing body/Tribal Council by the Head Start director.

Expected outcome:

Governing body/Tribal Council members fully understand and effectively use all fiscal information on which to make sound programmatic decisions.

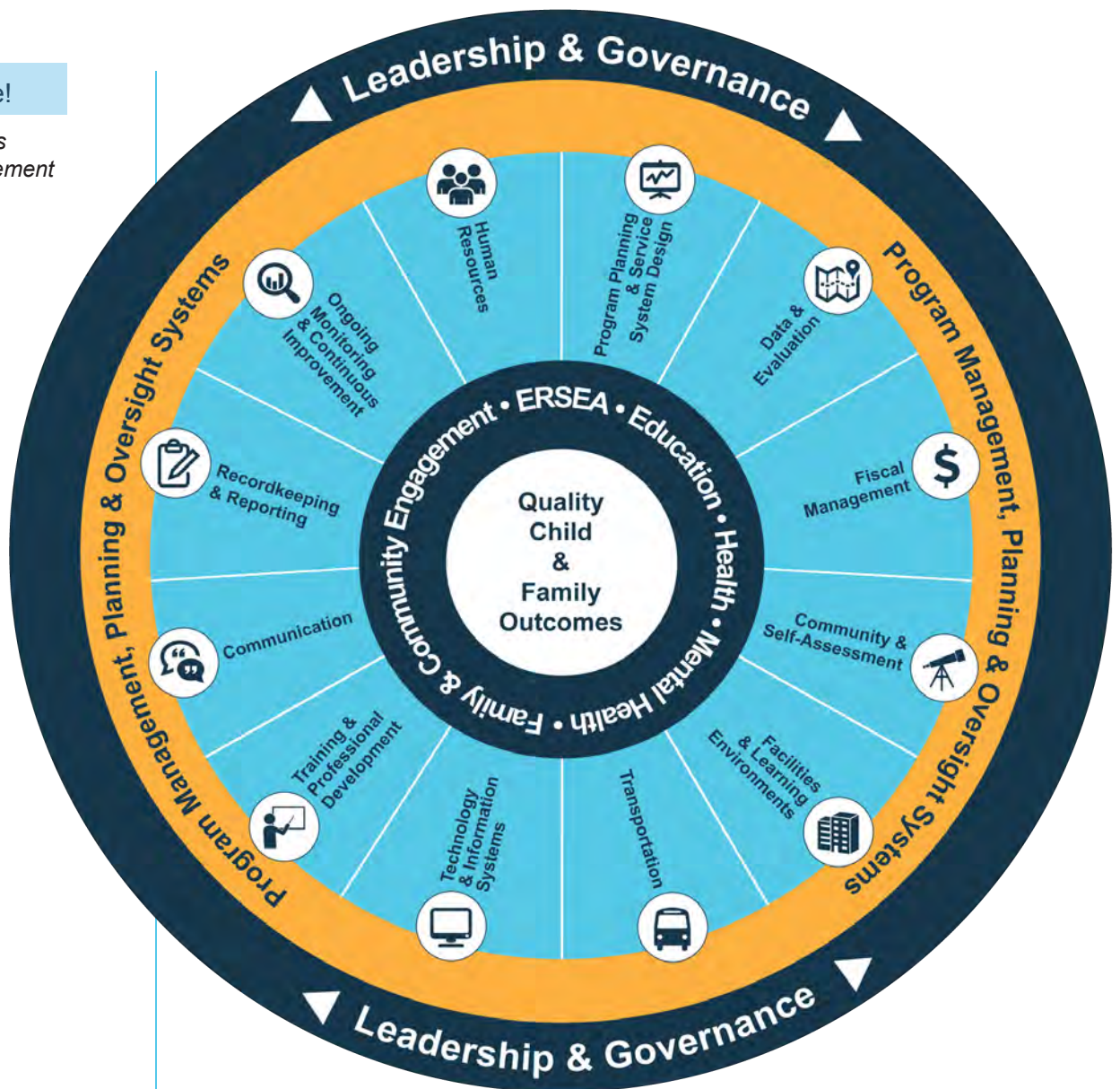
Expected challenge:

Competing financial responsibilities by grantee fiscal staff potentially creates inconsistency on how and when fiscal information is provided to governing body/Tribal Council.

topic 1: nuts and bolts of strategic planning

▶ Tell Me More!

Learn more about this planning and management tool on the ECLKC.



A big-picture perspective is consistent with systems thinking, a discipline that deals with seeing the whole. Systems thinking taps into a higher level of analyzing, problem solving, and strategizing. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge uses the analogy of putting together puzzles for the sheer joy of seeing the whole image emerge.⁵ He stresses the importance of seeing the “whole”—the “big picture” at the heart of systems thinking.

The Head Start Management Systems Wheel was developed to support Head Start programs in systems thinking. Leadership and governance are the bedrocks of effective management. They encompass and inform the 12 management systems. The yellow circle outlines the scope of these systems consistent with the five-year project period. The segmented aqua blue ring outlines each of the individual management systems. These systems work together to inform and influence the program’s service delivery, represented in the inner blue circle. This includes ERSEA, Education, Health, Mental Health, Community Partnerships, and Family Engagement.

To identify and voice challenges requires a safe space where staff can openly discuss whatever the data might reveal about program operations and outcomes. It is important to model and build a collaborative learning organization that values staff coming together as a community of learners for a continuous exchange of ideas.

What Is Meant by Evidence?

The baseline instructions of the Head Start Grant Application Instructions require programs to “provide evidence to demonstrate that the proposed [service] area is the area of greatest need.” The community assessment is a reliable source to gather the necessary data as evidence to support the assertion that you have selected the area of greatest need.

Evidence includes facts, information, documentation, or examples that support an assertion. This is where you ask “How do we know that we know what we know?” The evidence needed to effectively answer this question can be found in several different forms. Anecdotal and testimonial data tends to be a familiar type of evidence for Head Start programs. Head Start programs are also becoming increasingly familiar with collecting and presenting data in a way that provides compelling evidence to support a claim or assertion. There are multiple sources of evidence that are available to demonstrate an assertion. ■

What Is an Action Plan?


An action plan is a roadmap that can help you accomplish your program goals and objectives. Just as there are different ways to get to a destination if you are taking a trip, there are different routes a program can take to reach goals, meet objectives, and achieve outcomes.

Tips for Developing Action Plans

Include the three vital elements. Action plans generally include “what,” “who,” and “when.” They outline the action steps (the “what”) your program will take to achieve your goals and objectives, the person(s) responsible (the “who”), and the projected completion dates (the “when”). Most importantly, action plans highlight the “why” of a program goal. Research encourages us to lift up “why” in planning and inspire others to work in tandem to operationalize plans and accomplish goals. In *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, Simon Sinek reminds us that knowing the why of an activity fosters a greater sense of purpose and initiative in those doing the work.⁶

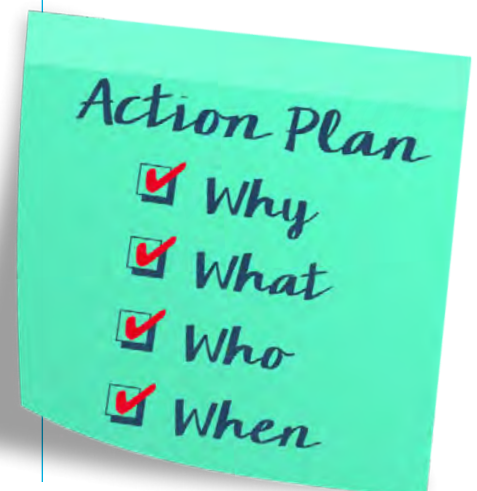
Add other ingredients. Additional ingredients might include such things as how you will measure progress, your evidence or data source, markers for quarterly status updates, financial supports, and resources needed.

Start each action with a verb. This will remind you that action steps are things to do.

 *What evidence will you gather to identify and address your program goals?*

Definition

Action plans are the roadmaps a program uses to accomplish goals and achieve objectives.



topic 1: nuts and bolts of strategic planning



Consider which actions are sequential and which are not. Some actions must be taken in chronological order because a specific action must be completed before the next can occur. See the examples in Topic 4. Other actions may happen simultaneously. Some actions may occur repeatedly or be ongoing. Order sequential actions with their related dates for completion. Indicate in the date column if actions are repeated or ongoing.

Use “Plan, Do, Review.” Many people are familiar with “Plan, Do, Review.” This concept is equally useful for an action plan. Creating an action plan is a big project. It’s tempting to clap your hands when you complete the plan and proudly put it on a shelf as a job well done. But an action plan should be a living document that is reviewed and updated as part of your program’s ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement process. It provides a clear and agreed-upon road map for all to follow. Reviewing your plan regularly offers opportunities to identify bright spots, celebrate small and large accomplishments along the way, and consider how your successes can inform your efforts in other areas of your program. It is also an opportunity to refine and adjust your strategies if you find they are not working, which creates the opportunity for a more robust and informed annual self-assessment.

! Action plans are living documents so “Plan, Do, Review” could be thought of as “Plan, Do, Review, and Revise as necessary.”

Keep it current. The best-laid plans do change as things go along. Make course corrections by adding additional action steps (or getting rid of ones that turn out to be unnecessary) and by changing timelines as needed. If you were not able to accomplish something you planned to do in January but it is now scheduled to take place in February, make sure your updated plan reflects this change so that stakeholders are informed. Don't forget to share your progress and updates with the governing board/Tribal Council and Policy Council members.

By understanding goals, objectives, outcomes, progress, and action plans, you can more effectively carry out your five-year plan. Thinking about the goals from a big-picture perspective allows you to anticipate expected challenges, and this, in turn, enables you to better forecast the expected outcomes. As your program engages in the five-year project period, your ability to craft broad, program goals, measurable objectives, and expected outcomes becomes a critical part of understanding the positive difference your program makes for children, families, and the community. ■

? *How do these criteria for action plans make you view your program's action plans differently?*



Now that you have identified the importance of program goals, objectives, outcomes, and action plans, **Topic 2** will help you distinguish between plans and planning and their significance in relation to strategic planning.

Strategic
long-term
goals

Expected
outcomes

Measurable
objectives

Anticipated
challenges