

Identifying Strategic Objectives and Initiatives

Developing Overarching Goals and Identifying the Initiatives to Accomplish Them;
Using Community Visioning and Root Cause Analysis Results as a Starting Point

What Are Strategic Objectives and Initiatives? Strategic objectives, as defined by the Massachusetts Planning and Implementation Framework, are the coherent group of overarching goals and key levers for improvement that will achieve the future vision. Strategic initiatives are the projects and programs that support and will achieve the strategic objectives.

Why This Step is Important: The strategic objectives and initiatives of the district plan emerge from:

- an understanding of the district’s current performance, achieved through data analysis;
- a vision of the future, achieved through a community visioning process; and
- a knowledge of effective practices, achieved through research.

While it is most helpful if root cause analysis and research of effective practices occurs in the early phase of the district planning process, both will provide value at any point throughout that process as the plan is developed. A district may choose to include research as part of a strategic initiative, for example, in the creation of a professional development plan or implementation of a multi-tiered system of support.

The Process for Identifying Strategic Objectives and Initiatives: Teams engaged in the planning process can begin to develop strategic objectives by identifying cross-cutting themes in the data that are available to them and that have been generated by the process. If the district has conducted visioning sessions with multiple groups across the community, the planning team should begin this process by synthesizing this community feedback in order to identify common themes. The work of identifying common vision themes is a valuable service provided by the planning team. Sharing these common themes back to the community, and explaining that these themes will inform the development of the plan’s strategic objectives, supports the community’s sense of ownership for both the process and the resulting plan.

The overall process for identifying strategic objectives and initiatives will vary depending on the district’s particular planning process, planning team structure, and the data that the planning team has gathered. The process below describes one possible approach to this work. This multi-step process would occur over consecutive planning team meetings.

1. *Identify common themes in community visioning results:* In a planning team meeting, organize into small groups of 4 to 5 participants to identify common themes in the data generated by community visioning sessions. If the district is using results from the Back to the Future Protocol, small groups can be focused by protocol question; for example, Group 1 could identify common themes for protocol question 1. Small groups record common themes and share with the whole group. The time required for this synthesis can range from 1.5 to 3 hours, depending on the amount of visioning data gathered. It is helpful to

the planning process if documented results are shared back to the community so that community members are aware of the outcome of this work.

2. *Identify strategic objectives:* In a planning team meeting, organize into small groups of 4 to 5 participants to draft strategic objectives. Small groups should work with all data generated by the planning process, including common vision themes, root cause analyses, SWOT analyses, and research. Participants are asked to identify the “big buckets” or overarching goals that emerge from these data. Small groups record draft objectives and share with the whole group. The whole group discusses any variations in objectives proposed across all groups in order to reach consensus. The time required for this work can range from 1.5 to 3 hours. It is helpful to the planning process if documented results are shared back to the community, to keep community members aware of and engaged in the planning process.
3. *Identify strategic initiatives:* In a planning team meeting, organize into small groups, one group per strategic objective. Small groups should work with all data generated by the planning process, including common vision themes, root cause analyses, and research. If you are using the Back to the Future Protocol, the results for question 3 will be particularly useful during this activity. Small groups may use the Strategic Objective/Initiative Organizer as a worksheet for completing their first draft of proposed strategic initiatives. The worksheet offers space to record 8 draft strategic initiatives at this initial stage, if necessary. The final plan will likely include fewer strategic initiatives, preferably in the range of 4 to 6 strategic initiatives per objective. The time required for this work can range from 2 to 3 hours.

Note to Facilitators: If the district is conducting visioning using the Back to the Future Protocol (<http://www.nsrharmony.org/system/files/protocols/future.pdf> and <http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/future.pdf>), you will find that all three of the protocol’s questions can serve as useful starting points in developing strategic objectives and initiatives. Themes identified for Back to the Future’s first two questions, about the future and present state, can serve as useful starting points in identifying strategic objectives. Themes identified for the protocol’s third question, about actions that helped the district to move from the present to future state, can serve as a useful starting point in identifying strategic initiatives.

As teams engage in the challenging and often messy work of developing strategic objectives and initiatives, it is helpful to remind participants that they are creating first drafts of plan components that will continue to be reviewed, revised, and refined during the planning process. The *Planning for Success* process includes a structured quality review of the draft plan as a final step in the process. In addition, prior to such a review, the planning team may choose to vet draft components of the developing plan with the larger community, sharing the work underway and providing opportunities for feedback. If you are facilitating a planning process that is shared between a district leadership team and a planning team, you may also want to structure that process so that these teams serve as reviewers of one another’s work, advancing the development and the quality of the emerging plan in this way.

Text for Facilitator Presentation Slides: Some suggested text for strategic objective and strategic initiative presentation slides is included below.

Slide 1: Identifying Common Vision Themes

- Organize into [X] small groups
 - [list group focus areas]
- Identify a facilitator and recorder
- Synthesize visioning feedback, identifying and recording common themes
- Share small group work with whole group
- Discuss as whole group

Slide 2: Strategic Objectives

- What are the strategic objectives—the overarching goals, the “big buckets”—you see across the data generated by the planning process?

Slide 3: As you work, ask yourself...

- Is this an objective—a “big idea”—a key lever for improvement to achieve the vision?
OR is this...
- A program or activity you would undertake to help achieve an objective?
- An outcome you could use to measure the success of an objective?

Slide 4: Identifying Strategic Objectives

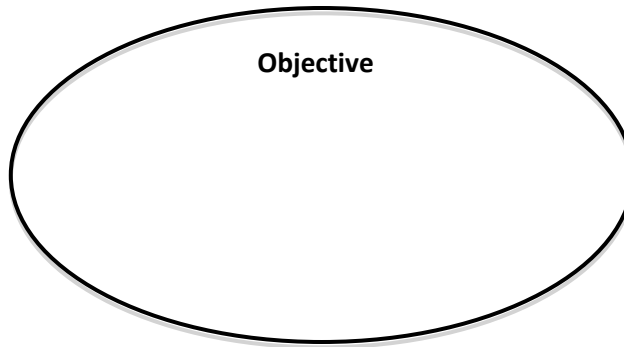
- Organize into [X] small groups
- Identify a facilitator and recorder
- Review available data looking for cross-cutting themes
- Draft 3-5 strategic objectives that respond to data
- Share small group work with whole group
- Discuss as whole group

Slide 5: Identifying Strategic Initiatives

- Organize into [X] small groups
 - [one group for each strategic objective]
- Identify a facilitator and recorder
- Review relevant data for proposed programs/activities
- Draft proposed strategic initiatives that respond to data
 - Use the Strategic Objective/Initiative Organizer
- Share small group work with whole group
- Discuss as whole group

Strategic Objective/Strategic Initiative Organizer

Identifying Projects and Programs to Support Improvement for an Overarching Goal



If we take this action(s):

Then we will accomplish this result: