

Foundational Planning Readiness

Organizational Self-Assessment

A public health agency may use a structured planning process to review, focus on, and meet the needs of the organization or community. Structured planning helps decision-making. It makes better use of resources and creates solutions that fit current and future needs.

Preparation is key for structured planning, but many agencies do not spend enough time on it due to competing priorities and limited bandwidth. This document helps prepare agencies for a structured planning process and is intended for public health leaders, managers, and planners who are responsible for developing or overseeing foundational plans and strategic documents.

Each organization has different goals, resources, and experiences. So, planning may look different in each organization. This document is designed to support agencies in assessing their readiness and identifying strategies to enhance the planning process. It provides a foundation for agencies to begin their planning journey with clarity and confidence.

Establishing clear alignment among foundational plans and strategic documents fosters consistency, optimizes resources, and enhances coordination. Common structured planning processes include:

Community Health Assessment: A community health assessment shows a full picture of a community's health, risks, and resources. It collects data to help understand health, socioeconomics, and available resources for improvement.¹ A community health assessment is a resource that health agency staff, partners, and community members can use to inform policy and program development, funding applications, use of resources, and health improvement planning.

Community Health Improvement Plan: The community health improvement plan is a strategic, collaborative roadmap built from the community health assessment. It outlines how the health department, partners, and the community will unite efforts to enhance overall health. The plan focuses efforts and resources on building a healthier community.¹

- **Organizational Strategic Plan:** A strategic plan outlines an organization's goals, how it will reach them, and how to measure success. It helps guide decisions and resource use across the health department.¹
- **Workforce Plan:** A workforce plan (sometimes called a workforce development plan) looks at current and future public health workforce needs and responds to demographic trends, strategically recruiting, training, and retaining individuals for key roles, and strengthening organizational culture.

¹Adapted from PHAB Accreditation Standards and Measures v2022 at: <https://phaboard.org/accreditation-recognition/version-2022/>

Data Modernization Plan: A data modernization plan outlines an organization’s data modernization goals, strategies, and how an organization will measure progress. Key components include strategies for:

- 1) Improving public health data systems to support public health work that includes forward-looking use of flexible, scalable, and sustainable infrastructure that leverages shared services and cloud-native technology.
- 2) Workforce development to address existing gaps, build skills and abilities of the current workforce, and sustain modernization gains.^{2,3}

Quality Improvement Plan: A quality improvement plan sets shared goals for improvement within the health department and cultivates a culture of quality. It requires a strong system to achieve and maintain improvement gains.¹

Emergency Operations Plan: An emergency operations plan outlines the public health functions required during an emergency response. It establishes the roles and responsibilities of health departments in preparing communities to respond to and recover from threats and emergencies.¹

Continuity of Operations Plan: A continuity of operations plan ensures that essential health department services can be maintained during an emergency response. It identifies critical functions, resources, and strategies necessary to sustain operations and minimize disruptions, ensuring the department’s ability to support the community effectively during and after an emergency.¹

Risk Communication Plan: A risk communication plan outlines the health department’s strategy for delivering accurate and timely information to the public about actual and perceived health risks, the status of an emergency, and recommended actions. It prioritizes addressing public needs and concerns while dispelling misinformation, aiming to influence behavior and protect the population’s health during emergencies.¹

² Adapted from ‘Public Health Infrastructure Grant (PHIG) Supplemental Guidance: Strategy A3, Core Data Modernization’(CDC, December 2023).

³ Adapted from Public Health Informatics Institute DMI Planning Toolkit available at: <https://phii.org/course/dmitoolkit/>

How to use this tool:

ASTHO created this tool to help public health agencies determine if they are ready for planning. It helps identify areas that need consideration before embarking on a structured planning process. Agencies should complete this tool separately for each planning process they hope to begin (e.g., if a health department is interested in beginning a strategic planning and a workforce planning process, they would complete this assessment twice, once for each planning process).

- a) Pick a planning process your organization wants to start.
- b) Examples may include one of the structured planning processes outlined above or include a narrower scope such as a Strategic Plan for a specific division, Workforce Plan for the entire department, Quality Improvement Plan for a grant-funded project, or a Training Plan for local health officers.
- c) Look at your current state for each numbered element below. Select the option that best fits your situation.
- d) Write your reasons for each rating in the Comments section. You can also explain any future actions you plan to take. These comments will provide a more detailed understanding of your organization’s readiness and can be used to guide future planning steps.

Numbered elements that a health department indicates as “No,” “Unsure,” or “Not Applicable (NA)” should be considered for potential priority areas for further preparations or discussions. “NA” should be used when the element does not apply to your specific planning process or organizational context.

If you have any questions or need assistance in completing the assessment, feel free to reach out to our team at performanceimprovement@astho.org. We’re here to support you through the process and help you take the next steps.

What planning process is in mind as you are completing this readiness assessment?
(Please use this tool to assess only one planning process at a time)

A. Engagement, Commitment, and Equity

Planning Process:

Strong leadership and inclusivity in a public health planning process can improve decision-making, ensure fairness in recommendations, allow for adaptability, and assure representation across diverse groups of key stakeholders.

Key definitions

Governing entity: The individual, board, council, commission, or other body with legal authority over the public health functions of a jurisdiction as established by charter, bylaw, ordinance, constitution, or statute. For example, a governing entity may be a board of health or a health officer.

Commitment: Dedicated and sustained effort by individuals and groups to actively support, participate in, and uphold the goals of a process or change initiative. It also may include a long-term investment in the outcomes or adapting behaviors and practices to support the work.

Champion: An individual or individuals with power and influence who take on the responsibility of raising awareness and support for the planning process and implementation of the plan. They help ensure that the process continues progressing and that resources are available to the planning and implementation teams.

1. The governing entity and leadership are actively engaged and committed to the planning process.

(e.g., They have committed to participating in or reviewing the planning process or draft plans, assured time, and resources (including staff), are available for planning efforts, and have begun communicating with key stakeholders about planning needs)

Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):

Comments:

Resources:

- [Why Change Efforts Fail](#)
- [What You Need to Know to Get Leadership Buy-In](#)
- [How to Gain Leadership Buy-In for Leading Change Initiatives](#)

<p>2. The governing entity has identified a champion or dedicated person to advocate for or participate in the planning process.</p>	
<p>Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation Champions as a Strategy to Build Capacity • Strategic Planning Champions: Social Craftspersons, Artful Interpreters, and Known Strangers 	
<p>3. The organization has defined clear roles and expectations for all involved in the planning process, specified contributors, decision-makers, and decision-making processes, and emphasized inclusivity and equity.</p> <p>(e.g., In a strategic plan, the team may include people from all areas of the organization. The organization may establish that despite job hierarchies, the planning team makes decisions by consensus rather than by team leaders alone to ensure planners hear all voices. A team charter may be a tool that helps the team think through and identify participants and their roles and responsibilities.)</p>	
<p>Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to Define Roles and Responsibilities for Team Success • Defining Team’s Roles and Responsibilities • Working Together: Team Roles and Responsibilities Exercise Guide • Charter Template and Guide 	

<p>4. Leadership and planning committee members are committed to a collaborative approach, thoughtfully considering all planning recommendations and making decisions that support shared goals and mutual benefit. They work together to ensure the decisions reflect the collective vision and strengthen the overall impact of the planning process.</p>	
<p>Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power Dynamics: A Systemic Inquiry • Changing Power Dynamics Among Researchers, Local Governments, and Community Members: Toolkit • Power Dynamics in Collective Impact • Guide to Managing Up: What It Means and Why It's Important • 10 Tactics for Working with Difficult People 	
<p>5. There is a commitment to the process with an emphasis on equity, ensuring diverse perspectives and fair representation from across the organization.</p> <p><i>(e.g., Building commitment may include involving individuals early in the planning process, communicating clearly and consistently about the work, providing necessary support and resources, and aligning the planning process with organizational values. It also may include recognizing contributions and addressing concerns to support long-term engagement in the process.)</i></p>	
<p>Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspiring Inclusion: 5 Tips for Project Leaders 	

B. Resources and Support		Planning Process:
<p>A solid foundation is key for planning success. With enough resources for both the planning and implementation processes, plans are easier to carry out, more efficient, and equitable.</p>		
<p>6. Resources are available to support planning amidst other work priorities in a manner that is realistic and achievable. (e.g., Staff time, funding for stakeholder engagement, consulting support).</p>		
Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):		Comments:
<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process Management – Resources Planning • Change Management eLearning Course 		
<p>7. There is access to skilled facilitators to support the planning process (internal or external).</p>		
Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):		Comments:
<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Planning: What to Expect When Selecting a Facilitator • Developing Facilitation Skills 		

8. There is a commitment to allocate sufficient and equitable resources for implementing core strategies identified through the planning process.

(e.g., Resources may include personnel, expertise, materials and equipment, space and facilities, funding, and economic resources. It is important to note that what is “sufficient” may vary between agencies and plans, depending on specific needs, capacities, and contexts.)

Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):

Comments:

Resources:

- [10 Steps to an Effective Resourcing Strategy](#)
- [Project Commitment](#)

C. Information Gathering and Understanding

Planning Process:

Information gathering is important to building a solid foundation for planning. A foundation of shared understanding makes it easier to identify needs, include different views, and create strategies that address priorities.

9. Leadership and planning committee members understand the purpose of the planning process.

Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):

Comments:

Resources:

- [3 Ways Leaders Drive Success Through Strategic Planning](#)

<p>10. Leadership and planning committee members are willing and able to gather comprehensive information about the current organizational landscape, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, program effectiveness, community needs, and potential collaborators.</p>	
<p>Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder Engagement for Strategic Planning • 5 Tips for Collaborative Strategic Planning 	
<p>11. Leadership and planning committee members have identified key partners and understand their relationships with each other and the organization to allow full participation, collaboration, communication, and maximize the contribution of everyone.</p>	
<p>Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to Involve Stakeholders in Strategic Planning: A Guide • Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders and Their Interests • Engaging Stakeholders in Strategic Planning • Building Non-Traditional Multisector Partnerships 	

D. Planning Integration, Implementation, and Sustainability

Planning Process:

Plan integration helps make sure the organization stays on track, adapts, and uses resources well for long-term success.

Key definitions

Commitment: Dedicated and sustained effort by individuals and groups to actively support, participate in, and uphold the goals of a process or change initiative. It also may include a long-term investment in the outcomes and adapting behaviors and practices to support the work.

12. There is a commitment to tie the plan to the organization’s annual planning and budgeting processes—to create a detailed yearly operating plan for the upcoming year and monitor/revise the plan as needed.

Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):

Comments:

Resources:

- [Business Plan, Strategic Plan, Operational Plan: Why All 3 Are Important](#)
- [Local Government Budget: Linking Your Budget & Strategy](#)
- [Why Budgeting Should Be a Strategic Planning Imperative](#)

13. The organization has established evaluation and monitoring systems to track progress toward priorities.

(e.g., Evaluation and monitoring systems may include a plan to identify performance indicators, data collection methods, baseline assessments, regular reporting, continuous quality improvement processes, and training. Systems do not need to be reliant on technology; however, monitoring platforms can be helpful.)

Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):

Comments:

Resources:

- [How to Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan](#)
- [Ten Steps to a Results Based Monitoring and Evaluation](#)
- [Monitoring and Evaluation Plan](#)
- [Performance Management Toolkit](#)

14. The organization will develop a communication plan and resources to communicate the planning process, the rollout, and the monitoring of the completed plan. To support this work, the organization will engage with internal and key external communication experts.

Current State (Yes, No, Unsure):

Comments:

Resources:

- [How to Effectively Communicate Your Strategic Plan to Employees](#)
- [Communication is Key: Three Strategies to Activate Your District’s Strategic Plan](#)
- [Five Components of a Successful Strategic Communications Plan](#)
- [Developing a Plan for Communication](#)

E. Foundational Plan Alignment and Sequencing

Planning Process:

There should be a clear understanding of the relationship between foundational plans. Aligning and sequencing foundational plans and other strategic documents is critical; it fosters consistency, optimizes resource utilization, ensures a comprehensive approach, improves coordination, and allows for the adaptability of needs and priorities. The order of the plans listed below is a suggested sequence to help ensure strong plan alignment; however, if your organization is in the midst of a planning process or other factors affect the sequence, know that there's no wrong place to begin.

15. The community has completed a [community health assessment](#).

Current State (Yes, No, Unsure, NA):

Comments and Date Completed:

16. The community has completed a [community health improvement planning](#) process.

Current State (Yes, No, Unsure, NA):

Comments and Date Completed:

17. The organization has completed an [organizational strategic planning](#) process.

Current State (Yes, No, Unsure, NA):

Comments and Date Completed:

18. The organization has completed a workforce planning process.	
Current State (Yes, No, Unsure, NA):	Comments and Date Completed:
19. The organization has completed a data modernization planning process.	
Current State (Yes, No, Unsure, NA):	Comments and Date Completed:
20. The organization has completed a quality improvement planning process.	
Current State (Yes, No, Unsure, NA):	Comments and Date Completed:
21. The organization has completed an emergency operations planning process.	
Current State (Yes, No, Unsure, NA):	Comments and Date Completed:

22. The organization has completed a continuity of operations planning process.	
Current State (Yes, No, Unsure, NA):	Comments and Date Completed:
23. The organization has completed a risk communication planning process.	
Current State (Yes, No, Unsure, NA):	Comments and Date Completed:
F. Past Experiences	
Planning Process:	
Consider past experiences preparing for and completing the other planning processes (related to this specific type of plan or other	
What contributed to past plan success?	What contributed to limited impacts of past plans?

G. Current Reality	
What is in place to support successful planning, implementation, monitoring, and sustainability?	What is necessary for successful planning, implementation, monitoring, and sustainability (e.g., specific skills, resources, support, etc.)?
What do you see as the biggest challenges or barriers preventing your organization from being fully ready to undertake this work?	How can external partners, such as ASTHO, best support your organization in building the capacity or readiness needed to undertake this work?

Next Steps

Now that you've completed the Foundational Planning Readiness Self-Assessment, take time to review your results and identify areas where your organization is well-positioned as well as areas that may require further development. Use this information to prioritize next steps, such as engaging key partners, securing resources, and reviewing previous strengths and successes.

Be sure to access and review the provided resources related to the numbered elements in the assessment to help guide your next steps. These resources are important tools to get you started down a change path; however, it's important to note that they may not immediately make you an expert on the topic or move your organization to a higher level of readiness. Progress in these areas often takes time and consistent effort.

Remember, a lower readiness level doesn't mean you can't proceed with a planning process, especially if there are other factors making planning a high priority. Starting the planning process, even at a lower readiness level, can create opportunities to strengthen capacity and uncover valuable insights along the way.

Consider developing an action plan to address any identified needs and continue building organizational readiness for future planning initiatives.

For additional support with planning readiness, please contact ASTHO's Performance Improvement team at performanceimprovement@astho.org or submit a PHIVE request.

Adapted from:

- https://www.lord.ca/uploads/tools/Lord_Readiness-Checklist-Strategic-Planning.pdf
- <https://oodp.ca/media/OODP-Strategic-Planning-Readiness-Assessment-Tool-Aug2016-PDF-Fillable-FINAL.pdf>
- <https://laridaemc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Strategic-Clarity-Org-Readiness-Self-Assessment-Tool.pdf>
- <https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Programs/Public-Health-Infrastructure/StrategicPlanningGuideFinal.pdf>