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# Guide to Strategic Planning for MRC Units (Including Logic Models)

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*A Guide for Local MRC Units*



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## Guide to Strategic Planning for MRC Units (Including Logic Models)

If you have created a mission statement, goals, and objectives, then you have already started the strategic planning process for your MRC program. Your goals and objectives should spell out *what* you want to accomplish. *How* you will get there is an important question that also deserves consideration.

There is no one right way to make your goals and objectives a reality. In fact, there are probably many different approaches or strategies that you could employ, and some may be more useful for you than others. Strategic planning is used to collect information and carefully evaluate potential courses of action. In a sense, it's about informed decision-making. This planning process necessitates a bit of due diligence up front, but the investment is worth it. Effective planning can improve your chances of long-term success.

Formally, strategic planning is the process of determining your program's long-term goals and identifying the best approach for achieving those goals. This definition outlines a simple equation: goals + actions = success. Because mission, goals, and objectives are covered in a separate MRC Guidance Series publication, in this document we will focus on how to sort out your *best approach*.

### **Identifying Mission, Goals, and Objectives**

If you have not yet identified a mission statement, goals, and objectives for your MRC, it is critical that you do this first. These will serve as the foundation for the rest of your planning. For those that have already developed these components, you may want to review your goals and objectives to ensure that they are appropriate, relevant, and reflect your unit's priorities before you begin your strategic planning effort. Please see the *Guide to Developing an MRC Unit Plan* for more information.

### **Planning Considerations**

- 1. Scope of your planning process:** Much like conducting needs/risk assessments, strategic planning processes may vary in intensity and length. You should do what works best for your MRC unit. Getting it right does not necessarily mean getting a consultant. Don't be afraid to dive in.
  - 2. Key participants/decision-makers:** You might also want to consider who you want to include as active participants in your planning process (these individuals may differ from those whom you solicit information from but do not include in decision making). Think about including a volunteer leader or key personnel from your housing agency. Strategic planning cannot, and should not, be conducted in a vacuum. Your process will benefit from a healthy exchange of ideas. Furthermore, broader participation can help build consensus around your goals and activities. At the same time, you do not need to include anyone and everyone. Make sure your process is manageable. There is no hard and fast rule for assessing the optimal number of key participants. Chances are your planning committee will vary in proportion to the size of your housing agency or MRC unit.
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3. **Timetables:** Consider outlining a timetable for your planning process. This might include delineating a set time period for information gathering, strategy development, feedback, decisionmaking, and action planning. You may simply establish a deadline for the completion of the planning process. Either way, you should be specific and include dates.
  4. **Integration with housing agency or partner plans:** Ascertain whether there are other strategic plans that may have already been developed by your housing agency or key partners. Think about how your goals, objectives, and strategies dovetail with these plans.
  5. **Decision-making:** Strategic planning inevitably includes making decisions. Keep in mind how decisions are made in your housing organization and/or MRC unit. This should inform your planning process. If you can, establish at the outset what decisions your planning body can make and what decisions might require additional approvals.

### **Strategy Development and Planning Tools**

In evaluating various strategies/activities, it is useful to collect a bit more data about your MRC program and the environment in which you work. A number of well-known tools are used to gather information and provide critical assessments. One of the most well-known and well-used tools is a SWOT analysis, which is discussed below.

#### **SWOT Analysis**

One of the most common ways to assess your MRC program is to develop a SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. A SWOT analysis highlights critical issues that your program faces. You will need to consider these issues in developing strategies to meet your goals and objectives.

#### **SWOT: Critical Elements**

- ▀▀▀ **STRENGTHS** are positive assets *within* your MRC unit (e.g., committed volunteers or a given level of participation within your unit).
  - ▀▀▀ **WEAKNESSES** are negative aspects *within* your MRC unit (e.g., shortage of volunteers or lack of specific equipment).
  - ▀▀▀ **OPPORTUNITIES** are positive elements *outside* your MRC unit that may affect your work (e.g., strong partnership with a given agency).
  - ▀▀▀ **THREATS** are negative elements *outside* your MRC unit that may affect your work (e.g., decreased funding).
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SWOT analyses are often presented in a two-by-two table, as shown below

| <b>STRENGTHS</b>   | <b>WEAKNESSES</b>   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Number of committed volunteers</b></li><li>• <b>Robust training program</b></li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Shortage of mental health professionals</b></li><li>• <b>Manual call down system</b></li></ul> |
| <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>   | <b>THREATS</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Demand for public health support in various areas (e.g., nutrition)</b></li><li>• <b>Nursing school in area with untapped personnel</b></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Budget cuts</b></li><li>• <b>Competing volunteer programs</b></li></ul>                        |

One of the critical drawbacks of a SWOT analysis is that it does not assign weights to various elements. All elements are presented as equally important. In reality, some items may be less important than others

### **Strategy Development**

Overall, SWOT analyses provide a snapshot of the internal and external environment in which your MRC unit operates. It can help you focus your strategies within areas where you have the greatest leverage and/or support. Conversely, your SWOT analysis can help you steer clear of ill-fated plans. For instance, given the SWOT detailed above, if you were seeking to increase nurse participation in your MRC unit in order to staff Points of Dispensing (PODs), you would likely consider low cost activities because of funding cuts

### ***Ready?...Set?...Action: Program Planning***

If strategic planning is *big picture* thinking, then program planning is about analyzing the nuts and bolts and making sure all the pieces fit together. Your program goals and objectives should flow seamlessly into your program activities. To better conceptualize this process, logic models are used. These models are used to create a snapshot of an activity, tracing it from issue, to action, to impact.

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## Logic Models

Logic models are used in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. They provide a “visual map” of activities as they relate to your goals and objectives. An example of a basic logic model is included at the end of this document.

Reading from left to right, the logic model describes a basic strategy by which a program’s resources and activities are expected to lead to desired results. These results should be modeled on your enumerated goals/objectives. It’s worth thinking through logic models in both directions, from need to outcome (goals/objectives) and in reverse, from outcome (goals/objectives) to need. Essentially, you are seeking to solve a problem. You can think forward from the need (What can my MRC do to solve this need?) or backwards from your objectives (How can my MRC help achieve objective X?).

## Building a Logic Model

The process of developing a logic model can be broken down into seven basic steps (described below). In developing your logic model, keep in mind not every program detail has to be cataloged, just those that are vital to understanding how your unit works.

- 1. Get ready:** Using the Logic Model graphic included at the end of this document as a guide, write your mission, goals, and objectives at the bottom of the page (if you know which specific goal/objective you wish to target, include this information). These should serve as a reminder that your program’s inputs, outputs, and outcomes need to align with these goals.
- 2. List the situations:** In the first column, list situations your MRC unit wants to address. These will likely have been the critical issues you identified in conducting your risk and/or needs assessments, and subsequently used to shape the development of your goals and objectives. For example, a situation may be that the incidence of seasonal influenza in XYZ County is among the highest in the state (need). The county health department needs additional personnel to administer flu shots at clinics to be held in the county (goal/objective).

Your goals may involve multiple situations; start by building a logic model focused on just one of these situations. Once you have gone through these steps for one situation, go back and complete these same steps for the remaining situations (needs).

- 3. Define your inputs/resources:** Think about your MRC unit’s resources. Resources for conducting activities include:
    - a. People
    - b. Equipment
    - c. Money
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List the resources you currently have available in the second column. Examples of inputs that are likely to be common to many MRC units include:

- a. Volunteers
- b. Infrastructure (or the housing organization)
- c. Equipment and supplies
- d. Partnerships
- e. Funding

**. Define your outputs (activities and participation):** Outputs are activities, products, or services that the MRC unit produces for a targeted population. They are comprised of what we do (activities), and who we reach (participation). Outputs are intended to lead to specific outcomes. For example, the XYZ County MRC staffs flu clinics to provide flu shots to residents who lack health insurance. The main output is staffed vaccination clinics, and specific outputs might include the number of clinics and number of hours worked. List the outputs you intend to produce

If the activities occur in stages, the items should reflect their sequential order reading from top to bottom. When an outcome from one activity serves as a resource for another activity, an arrow is drawn from that output to the next activity

**5. Link your inputs and outputs:** For each input you have available, consider which outputs it will support. For instance, in our example above, volunteers (inputs) are needed to support flu vaccination clinics (outputs). Do you have sufficient inputs/resources to support your activities, and are you using your resources wisely? For example, do you have enough volunteers to staff one clinic or multiple clinics?

Every input should be linked to at least one output; otherwise it is irrelevant and not being utilized. Similarly, every output should be linked to at least one input; otherwise it clearly cannot be produced. This linking process may reveal that your inputs and outputs do not connect well, and you may have to obtain additional inputs or change your intended outputs

**6. Define the outcomes you expect:** Consider the outcomes that you expect will occur as a result of your program's efforts. Outcomes are the changes or benefits that you expect will result from outputs provided by your program. Generally, outcomes are defined as changes in attitudes, behaviors, skills, knowledge, status, or level of functioning. They may be organized by short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes

- a. **Short-term outcomes** are changes that are most closely associated with your program's outputs. For example, using MRC volunteers to augment flu clinic staffing might result in an increase in the number of people receiving vaccinations
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- b. Intermediate outcomes** are changes that result directly from the short-term outcomes. For example, public health surveillance in XYZ County reveals a marked reduction in the number of influenza cases reported
  - c. Long-term outcomes** are changes that follow from the benefits accrued through intermediate outcomes. They are generally synonymous with the program's goals, which are identified during strategic planning

Link each output (activity) with the expected outcomes. *If an output does not link to at least one goal/objective that your program is trying to achieve, you might consider whether the activity is one in which your MRC unit should be engaged.*

- 7. Verify the model:** It is important to check each element of your logic model for accuracy and completeness. Every input should feed an output (activity) and every output should lead to an outcome. Show your logic model to stakeholders and ask whether they understand the logical flow of the program. Ask the following questions:
- a.** Is the level of detail sufficient to illustrate the interrelationship of the elements?
  - b.** Is it complete (are all key elements included)?
  - c.** Is the program logic theoretically sound? Are there other ways to achieve the desired outcomes?
  - d.** Are important external contextual factors identified and their potential influences described?

Review the model and ensure that it makes sense. There should be a logical progression from left to right. One way to do this is to start in any column and ask "How did we get here?" For example, if we select a particular short-term outcome, is there an output statement that leads to this outcome? Is the logic sound? In other words, are we correct to assume that the outputs (activities) will result in the desired outcomes?

Another way to look at the logic model is to read it from right to left. Some organizations like to start with the outcomes that they hope to achieve and work backwards, determining the outputs that would lead to the outcomes and the activities and inputs that would be necessary to achieve those outputs. Your logic model should make sense either way you look at it.

The logic model process ensures that the program design is logical and complete. It helps define the criteria for program success and how it will be measured. In fact, steps 6 and 7 of the logic model development process represent the first stages of performance measurement.

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## ***Planning in Action***

At the end of the day, strategic planning, coupled with the development of specific program plans using the logic model, should provide your unit with a concise programmatic roadmap. It is now up to you to follow the plan.

### **Action Planning**

You thought you were done with planning—well, almost. Action plans provide a guide for managing a project or activity. They outline what needs *to be done* to implement a project. You may not need to develop formal action plans, but it is worth thinking about how your unit will conduct itself in a given activity, project, or emergency operation.

### **Re-Evaluation and Retooling Plans**

As the environment changes, so too will your plans. Take the time to revisit your goals and objectives, as well as your logic modeling, on a periodic basis. You may find that some of your assumptions have changed, and your programming might need to change with them.

## ***MRC Strategic Planning Checklist***

- Identify your mission, goals, and objectives
- Determine who should be part of your planning process
- Develop your timetable
- Integrate with other existing strategic plans and be aware of the constraints on decision making
- Assess the MRC unit's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
- Develop your logic model
- Using the logic model, plan your activities
- Evaluate your program and adjust your plans accordingly

## ***Additional Resources***

### **SWOT Resources**

WikiSWOT (provides hundreds of examples of SWOT analyses):  
<http://www.wikiswot.com/>

### **Logic Model Resources**

University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Logic Model:  
<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html>

United Way's Outcome Measurement Resource Network  
<http://www.liveunited.org/outcomes/>

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University of Arizona Community Health Worker Evaluation Tool Kit:  
<http://www.publichealth.arizona.edu/chwtoolkit/>

**General Strategic Planning Resources**

Medical Reserve Corps Self-Evaluation Tools:  
<http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/SelfEvaluationTools>

MRC Program Planning and Evaluation Resources:  
<http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/PromisingPracticesToolkit.asp?mode=BrowseByCategory&category=26>

Community Tool Box—Developing a Strategic Plan:  
[http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/chapter\\_1007.htm](http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/chapter_1007.htm)

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# Logic Model

