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Good in Theory, Better in Practice

Adaptive Planning Toolkit

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Addressing complex societal problems requires an adaptive approach. Developing comprehensive strategies for how to get to a goal works in some contexts, but these types of plans are often insufficient in the face of a rapidly changing environment. Instead of focusing on strategies, the focus in adaptive planning is on understanding the desired results and then understanding the context and assumptions about how to get to that change. Put another way, you plan for adaption by focusing on the results.

This toolkit is designed to walk through an adaptive planning process, from defining results to exploring environmental context and then engage in strategy and action planning. It includes examples, tools, tips and, practical and accessible resources, building on Spark's 15 years of experience in the field as well as that of our partners.

KEY PRINCIPLES:

01 CONTINUOUS VALUES:

the focus of keeping continuous values is not on the summative results, but rather the value in achievements that occurred in response to small goals and activities. This mindset allows you to emphasize the end goal and the results of short-term goals in relation to that end goal. Continuous values are important for assessing complex problems, because they avoid the need to develop comprehensive, static, or rigid plans of action. Instead, the focus is on trying new strategies, while ensuring adjustments and revisions occur continuously and are of value.

02 RESPONSIVE EXPLORATION:

a deep dive into understanding the context and assumptions about what it will take to reach diverse solutions. Gathering external information or systematically mining your own thinking to gather additional information to guide the planning is crucial. This information could focus on mapping the current environment and sources of influence or forecast the future environment. Potential futures could be influenced by social, technological, economic, political, or environmental changes. Responsive exploration is important for adaptive planning because the process of figuring what could occur is, itself, valuable and can guide future planning processes.

03 DATA-DRIVEN:

monitoring of progress and change is required to be successful in adaptive planning. After completing short-term activities or goals, data and metrics should be collected and interpreted. Based on the information obtained, adaptive planning holds itself accountable to the unforeseen forces, leading to strategy and goal development or revisions overtime. Complex problems need to be broken down into a series of meaningful smaller solutions and then assessed to ensure end-of-road success.

04 RESOURCE VERSATILITY:

due to the dynamic and flexible nature of adaptive planning, resources should be capable of variation so they can easily shift to meet the needs of new goals, activities, and results. Resources should be viewed as living documents or templates that evolve as your situation shifts. They should not focus on immediate steps down the road, because that risks the creation of a static plan which makes reacting to a changing environment difficult. Resource versatility is key to achieving near-term results, because new opportunities or constraints might arise that may affect your ability to move strategies forward.

05 ACHIEVEMENT ORIENTED:

throughout adaptive planning you will develop unique goals with specific achievements. The intention is to develop high-level and action goals for long-term and short-term work, respectively, and build in ways to learn and be adaptive over time. Long-term overarching approaches allow you to appropriately allocate resources and understand your end goal. Short-term goals encourage you to stay relevant in the current environment. Ongoing goals encourage you to collect information about the environment and take time to reflect and make revisions to next steps. Each strategy will be met with small and large achievements.

OVERVIEW

Adaptive planning is a set of tools and processes for developing plans for solving complex, adaptive problems. Unlike traditional planning processes, adaptive planning keeps the focus primarily on the results you're trying to achieve, with less time spent on creating detailed strategic plans.

The toolkit describes the three major steps in adaptive planning, providing specific processes and tools for implementing these steps:

Clearly defining the results:
Articulating the ways the world needs to change, both small and large, to solve a complex problem.

Exploring the context and your assumptions:
Gathering external information or systematically mining your own thinking to surface deeper information to guide the planning, often information focused on mapping the current environment and sources of influence or forecasting the future environment.

Engaging in strategy and action planning:
Developing high-level strategies for the longer-term and action plans for shorter-term work, and building in ways to learn and be adaptive over time.

Comparing Adaptive to Traditional Planning

As seen in the graphic below, in traditional planning, we spend about 10% of our time thinking about results (often a vision statement or set of high-level outcomes), 10% of our time scanning the environment, and 80% of our time documenting exactly what we are going to do – our goals, objectives, activities, deliverables, milestones, etc. – and then we execute.

This formula can be successful in certain contexts: those that are predictable and where the knowledge about what is needed is well documented and refined. However, in settings where the problem is complex and solutions are uncertain, this type of planning can, and often does, lead to failure.

As seen in the graphic below, in complex settings, we want to avoid developing comprehensive plans of action and instead focus our effort on understanding the results we want to achieve – how we believe the world needs to change to solve the problem. Then we want to dive deep into understanding the context and testing some of our assumptions about what it will take to get to the solutions. From there, we can begin to plan our short term actions and for higher-level strategies over the long term. We also plan how to adapt along the way.

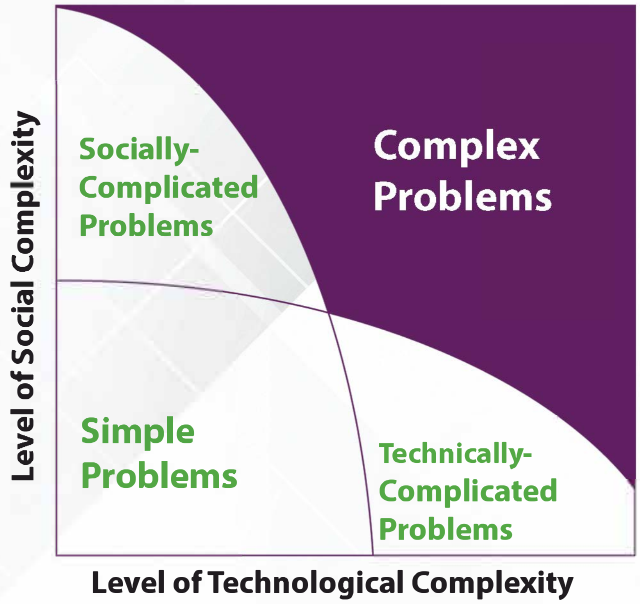
Resources

The Stanford Social Innovation Review's article, "The Strategic Plan is Dead. Long Live Strategy" has a great comparison of traditional planning processes and the more adaptive, experimental processes needed in complex settings.

When to Use Adaptive Planning

Adaptive planning is not appropriate for all settings. To determine if adaptive planning is the right fit for your situation, you need to think about the context and the problem.

The graphic here presents the different types of problems to solve. Simple problems have minimal levels of social and technological complexity. While complex problems have high levels of social or technical complexity.



Simple Problems:

are those where the right “recipe” is essential but once you’ve discovered it, replication will get you almost the same result every time. They are problems that are similar to baking a cake: you may not know the recipe to start, but once you have it, you’re good to go. If solutions are implemented correctly and with quality, a pre-determined set of activities can be expected to produce a predictable chain of outcomes over time and in different settings. You would not use adaptive planning to address a simple problem.

Socially-Complicated Problems:

the right “protocols and formulas” are known or can be known, but agreement on the problem they will solve, whether it should be solved, who has the right to solve it, and what solution should be used is lacking. Water conservation is an example of a socially complicated problem as many of the policy and technology solutions are known, but the political and public will is inconsistent. Socially-complicated problems often benefit from adaptive planning processes because they are typically heavily influenced by the context and shifting environments.

Technically-Complicated Problems:

require the right “protocols and formulas” and high levels of expertise and training. There is not a high level of debate about whether the problem exists, whether it should be solved, or even who should solve it, but it is difficult to come up with the protocols and formulas to solve the problem. set of solutions) is found. Experience is built over time to get to the right result, which can be repeated over time with the expectation of success. Curing cancer is a good example – few people disagree with the idea that we need new protocols for curing cancer, but while we’ve made real progress, we have a long way to go before a solution (or set of solutions) is found.

Complex Problems:

are the problems that are socially and technologically complicated. There are no “right” recipes or protocols that work in every situation, many outside factors influence the situation, and every situation is unique. Experience helps, but in no way guarantees success. Raising a child is a helpful metaphor – just as each complex problem is unique, each child is unique because of biology and social interactions – at every step of the way the child adapts and becomes less predictable than they were the day before. Experience helps, but it is not sufficient to guarantee success. Examples of complex problems include natural resource planning, voting rights, and crime prevention, all of which have had shifting social environments and there is no set formula for what works.

Adaptive planning is critical when tackling complex problems. It can also be appropriate for complicated problems, though not in all settings. One way to know if an adaptive planning process is a fit for a complicated setting is to ask yourself how uncertain you are about what it will take to get to the solution. If the uncertainty is high, adaptive planning is the approach for you!

Integrative Thinking

One of the overarching tools to integrate into your adaptive planning process is called integrative thinking. For many people, being faced with two opposite options means making a choice between the two and, often, the act of choosing is stressful and difficult. In contrast, integrative thinking uses the tension between the two choices as an opportunity to generate creative and innovative solutions.

This approach is relevant when you are articulating intended results, gathering context information, and selecting strategies. By integrating multiple perspectives and understandings of the problem, you are more likely to be comfortable with the idea of a plan that will need to adapt over time. When we are invested in specific definitions of the problem, solutions, or even ways of getting to solutions, it can be very difficult to adapt regardless of how much evidence suggests we should.

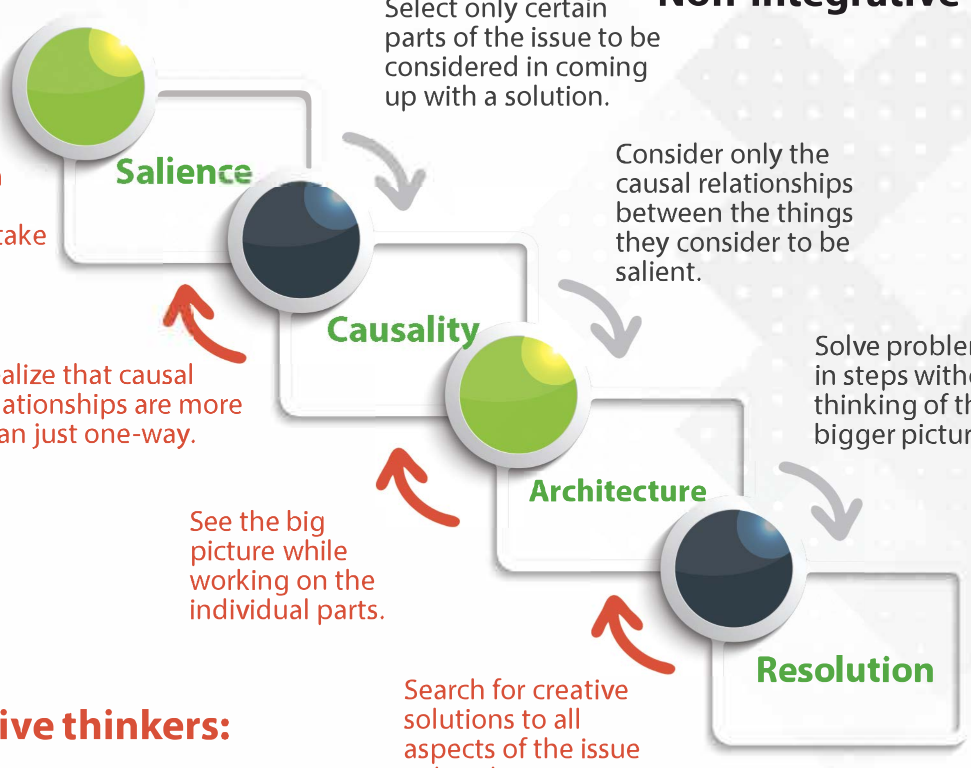
Non-integrative thinkers:

Select only certain parts of the issue to be considered in coming up with a solution.

Consider only the causal relationships between the things they consider to be salient.

Solve problems only in steps without thinking of the bigger picture.

Consider the resolution as only the end product.



See the problem from multiple viewpoints and take them all into consideration.

Realize that causal relationships are more than just one-way.

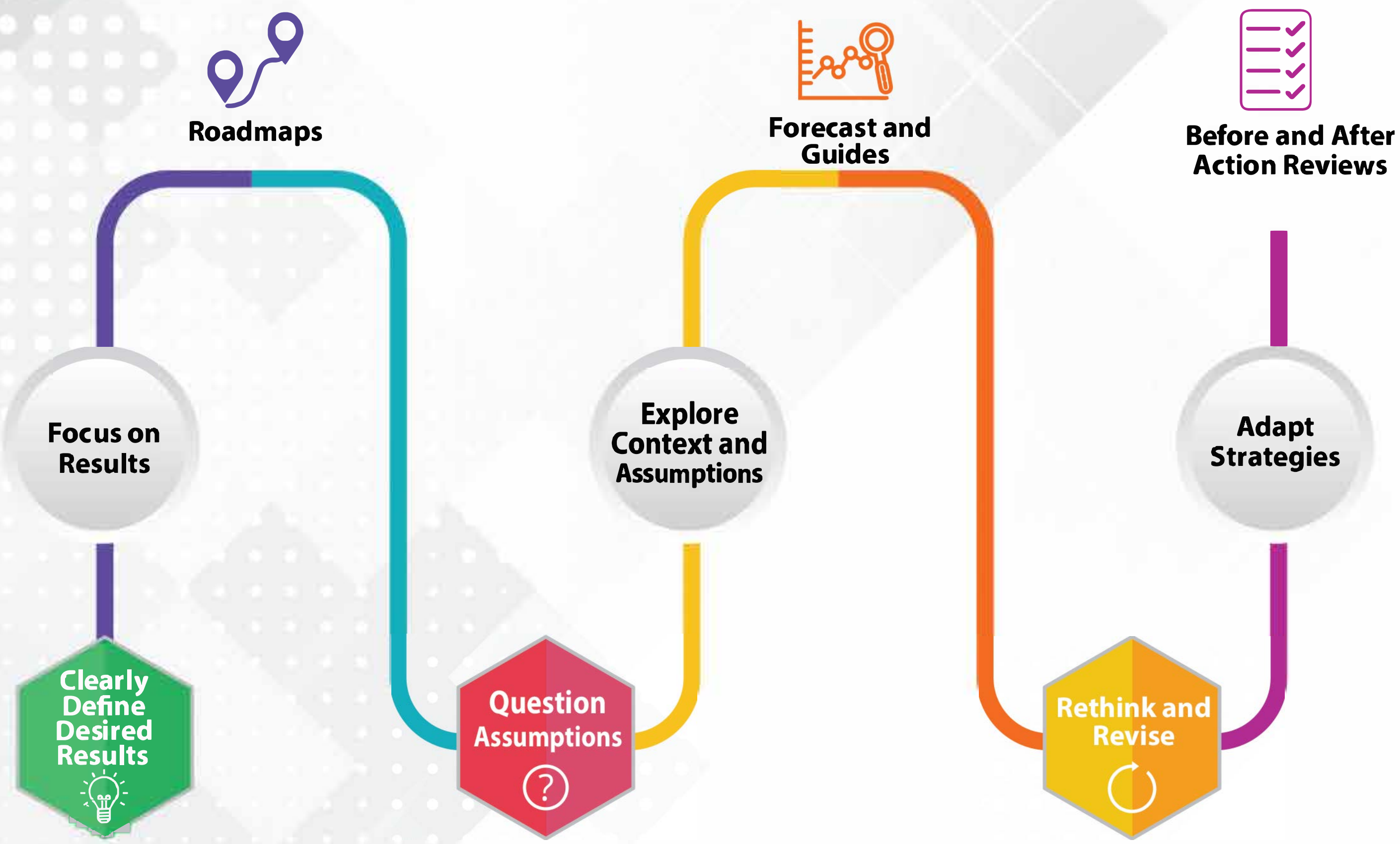
See the big picture while working on the individual parts.

Search for creative solutions to all aspects of the issue at hand.

Integrative thinkers:

The Tools and Processes of Adaptive Planning

Adaptive planning processes need tools for each of the three planning components: defining your results, exploring your context and assumptions, and developing and revising your strategies over time.



There are several tools that can help! Strategic Roadmaps are designed to help you focus on results while Before and After Action Reviews (BAR/AARs) can help you craft the adaptive strategy that get you to your results. Other tools are designed to help question the assumptions we have about what it will take to get to the desired outcome and understand the context. These include forecasting strategies (e.g. scenario mapping, simulations, pre-mortems, and the Delphi Method) and mapping strategies (e.g., systems, network, power, and stakeholder mapping).

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Focus on Results: Introducing Strategic Roadmaps

Strategic Roadmaps are a powerful tool for taking a complex problem and breaking down the solution into a series of meaningful, smaller changes on the way to the big success.

They are a backwards planning process in which we define the big change we want to see in the world and then define the smaller changes that will lead to that big change. While Strategic Roadmaps often include strategies, the strategies are typically only related to the most immediate steps on the road, to avoid the problem of planning yourself into a static response to a changing environment.

The End of the Road

Strategic Roadmaps begin with articulating the End-of-the-Road, a specific and achievable, but ambitious change in the world that is critical for solving a complex, adaptive problem. These are typically the systemic changes needed to create benefit for more visionary reasons (e.g. healthy families, health communities, healthy environments).

Example End-of-the-Roads include:

- ✔ Statewide sustainable Farm to School
- ✔ Improved economic and ecological health of the Mississippi River
- ✔ Effective pathways to employment for disconnected youth

The End-of-the-Road is focused on systemic changes because the more visionary change is often influenced by many different things. For example, children eating healthy food in schools is influenced by what they eat at home, time available to eat in school, the presence of vending machines, etc. A group working on Farm to School won't tackle all of these things, so they keep their End-of-the-Road more narrowly focused, knowing from a vision point-of-view that they are trying to expand Farm to School in part to influence whether children eat healthy food in schools.

The Preconditions to the End of the Road

Typical backwards planning will help you to articulate where you are today and where you want to go, and then you plan backwards from there. These plans, while powerful in their focus on the long-term change, still tend to be filled with strategies – the things you do – rather than the changes you need to cause in the world on the way to the bigger success.

With Strategic Roadmaps, once you articulate the End-of-the-Road, you next ask yourself:

What is an immediate pre-condition to achieving that end of the road? In other words, what is a change in the world that is necessary to get to the larger change?

You keep asking this question, backing yourself out from the end-of-the-road to smaller changes that are achievable in the near-term. This gives you a clear sense of the path to achieving the End-of-the-Road and confidence that what you're working on achieving today is directly related to what you care about in the big picture.

Please note: Although Strategic Roadmaps are adapted from Theories of Change, unlike Theories of Change they are not linked to measurable change and are less focused on strategies; rather, they often provide more detail and focus on pre-conditions.

The preconditions in Strategic Roadmaps are also specifically systemic changes and sometimes movement building or other environmental changes. The preconditions are never the actions the group who is trying to cause change is taking or the steps along the way to get to changes. They are how change needs to happen.

Example Strategic Roadmap: Farm to School Task Force

The Colorado Farm to School Task Force, a legislatively mandated group formed in 2011, used a Strategic Roadmap process to guide its work and has continued to update and refine the roadmap every year as their work adapts in response to changing needs and a shifting environment.

The preconditions they identified to their End-of-the-Road are a mix of systemic changes in the food system, changes in schools, and policy changes.

For more about the Colorado Farm to School Taskforce Roadmap process, and to see some of their early outcomes, check out this blog. To see the full Colorado Farm to School Taskforce Strategic Roadmap, please visit their website.

Using the Strategic Roadmap

Strategic Roadmaps are a powerful starting place for an adaptive planning process. Once you have one, you can integrate learning about the context/environment and design short-term strategies to tackle the earlier changes along the road. You can also predict the higher level strategies likely to be needed over the longer term, knowing they are likely to need adaptation.

Strategic Roadmaps are also tools for telling the story of your work. The Farm to School Task Force uses their roadmap with many different stakeholders, including keeping it on the front page of their website.

In addition, Strategic Roadmaps can be useful in working with your evaluator to make sure they are paying attention to the same changes as the ones you hope to influence. Specifically, they can help in talking with the evaluator about the importance of not holding your group accountable for the "how" of your work, but rather the "why" of it.

Finally, a Strategic Roadmap is a powerful prioritizing tool. When new ideas or opportunities arise, you can ask yourself whether they help you influence any of the preconditions on your roadmap. If not, chances are they may not be the best use of time and other resources.

- Helps you plan short-term strategy and action
- Helps you plan for when to reassess
- Helps you tell the story of why your work is important to new partners, funders, etc.
- Helps your evaluator tell the story of how you contributed to meaningfull change.
- Helps you prioritize which opportunities to act on and which ones to pass on

Similarities and Differences from Theories of Change

Strategic Roadmaps emerged from our use of Theories of Change, but they are not the same.

Specifically:

- Similar to Theories of Change, they help participants articulate the change they want;
- Similar to some Theories of Change, they help to break a significant change in the world into achievable, smaller changes along the way;
- Unlike most Theories of Change, they are not limited to measurable change;
- Unlike most Theories of Change, they are focused on meaningful systemic changes, rather than programmatic outcomes or activities of partners; and
- Unlike most Theories of Change, they assume the strategies that are relevant today may not be relevant tomorrow and do not ask you to document what you will do over the life of your initiative or project.

Focus on Results: The "How To" of Strategic Roadmaps

Strategic Roadmaps are created through a set of specific steps. Below is the general flow of the process, but keep in mind that you will need to adapt it to where your group is at in the process and what they need to do next. For example, if you already have a theory of change, you may want to reorganize it into a Strategic Roadmap and bring it to your partners to flesh out, rather than starting from scratch.

Step 1: Background Work

Before undertaking a road-mapping process, make sure to identify the right participants for the process. Be thoughtful about who will be in the room and know what they care about so you can go in aware of what you're going to work on together. Ideally, have a mix of people who understand the high level strategic choices and the ways the world will need to change along with the people who need buy-in to implement the plan that emerges from the process.

Knowing your group well enough and having a rough sense of their end of the road, can help you avoid surprises. You should also have a sense of the type of work likely to be involved the strategy (e.g. programmatic work, influencing policy, community mobilizing). This will help you understand how this work will affect their ability to reach the end of the road, as well as to identify the difference between a strategy and a precondition.

Step 2: The Facilitated Dialogue

Facilitating a roadmap process can be a challenging, but essential, part of creating a road map: this is the "how your group will think critically about the meaningful change you are looking to create", and it is the development of their Strategic Roadmap working draft. As you go through the process, remember to relax and let go of the desire to control the conversation –these processes can, at times, feels chaotic and may not feel productive, but participants need the brainstorm space, as well as space to refine, test, assess, and then clean up.

- The first step is to work with the participants to identify the End-of-the-Road (EOR). Write the EOR on the wall, refine, and finalize it. When you have a final EOR, write it down on a large sticky note and put it on the wall.
- Next, work with participants to identify what the immediate preconditions are to the EOR using a second color of large sticky note, acknowledging the strategies that surface using a third color sticky note. Have participants put up sticky notes where they feel relevant and/or rearrange them or take on this role yourself. Remember to consider changes from where you are today vs. changes near the EOR.
- Finally, clean-up the visual with the participants (sometimes individual reflection or group participation directly with the sticky notes helps). Make sure everything in the precondition color is in the sphere of influence and everything in the strategy color is in the sphere of control for the group doing the work. Ask for individual reflection on the completed roadmap, including what assumptions are being made about how change can occur, which will help surface things to investigate between this and the next meeting.

Step 3: Refining the Visual

After the facilitated dialogue, you will want to make the electronic version of the Strategic Roadmap visual as quickly as you can, because it's easy to lose the story line. The electronic version will summarize, combine, collapse, and overall simplify the electronic visual compared to what was on the wall.

The next step is to research the relationships between the preconditions, between strategies and preconditions, and between preconditions and the End-of-the-Road. This will allow you to surface insights about the areas where there are assumptions and to revise accordingly.

You will then want to review the final Strategic Roadmap with your partners and finalize (for now!).

Step 4: Operationalizing the Strategic Roadmap

Of course, it's not just about having a pretty document; you need to be able to operationalize your plan. See the section on Developing Strategies for more about this step in the process.

Step 5: Revisions

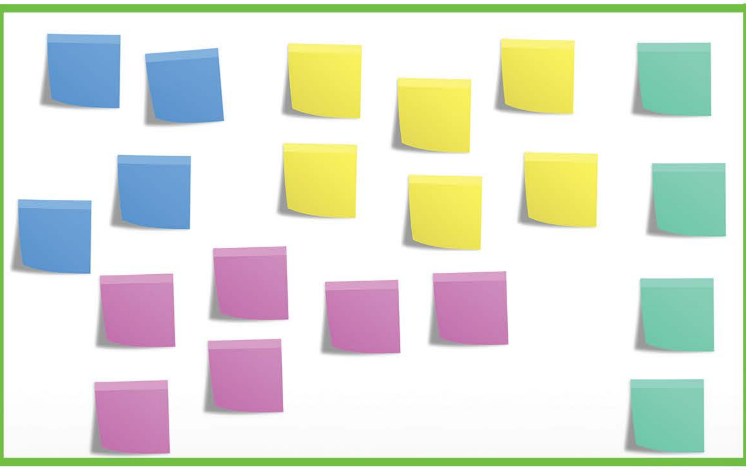
Strategic Road maps are living documents. As your environment will shift, you'll learn from your attempts to achieve near-term results, new opportunities might arise or constraints in resources or capacity may limit your ability to move strategies forward.

Strategic Roadmaps can and should be revised regularly!

Plan for revisions and accept them any time it comes up and the revisions are relevant and thoughtful. If the group doesn't feel there is any need to revise, it might be a signal that they are not actively scanning their environment or assessing the effectiveness of their strategies. It can also be a signal that they are not thinking about their work through the lens of adaptation!

When planning for the facilitated dialogue, keep in mind that you will need a large, empty wall space for participants to put up sticky notes and lots of large sticky notes and markers. It is helpful to have a space where the participants can face the wall, as well as room for people to move around and put up the sticky notes.

If possible, you may want to consider having a note-taker who can type up notes, especially to capture areas of conflict or disagreement that you may want to surface later, as well as any preconditions the group has rejected and why. At the end of the process, have your note-taker take a picture of the wall so you can make sure to capture everything.



Exploring Assumptions & Context: Forecasting

One of the things that makes an adaptive planning process fundamentally different from other types of planning is the assumption that many different futures are possible and you need to be prepared for, or able to, adapt in response to what emerges.

In order to be prepared, it is important to take the time to explore the potential futures ahead. The forecasting techniques below are approaches to exploring the future.

In some ways, these techniques are not dramatically different from a strategic conversation focused on "what if" questions. They ask similar questions and benefit from the various types of expertise that one might want in a strategic conversation about the future. However, they do differ in one very important way: they are systematic, rigorous ways of examining the potential futures. They push the learning to another level, drawing on more than intuition surfaced in group dialogues. For that reason, they can be powerful tools for helping planning groups to take their process to the next level as well.

Scenario Planning

Scenario planning builds flexibility into a process by surfacing several possible futures and then exploring how decisions might play out under these different conditions. Specifically, scenario planning identifies major drivers of the future environment (social, technological, economic, political, or environmental) allowing planners to think about how to prepare for these possible contexts. It is a collaborative process in which the team determines which drivers are under their sphere of control, which are understood, and which are uncertain and constructs a range of possible futures by either:

- Grouping the most positive and most negative drivers and arraying them along an axis, or
- By selecting the two most important drivers, identifying a set of "states" for each, and then crossing them to create a matrix of possible futures.

Resources

- For a more detailed but accessible look at scenario planning, including possible pitfalls and real-life examples, check out Future Scenarios: The Art of Storytelling, by Moya K Mason.
- For an example of a scenario map completed as part of an adaptive planning process, see The Future of Health Policy in Colorado. This example is documented in the Consumer Advocacy Funding Strategy case study in the Community Resources section.
- For more information on strategizing under uncertainty, review this blog.

In adaptive planning, having a description of multiple potential futures helps in thinking about the ways the strategy needs to be adaptive and what elements of the strategy will remain relevant regardless of the future that unfolds. Once you have your scenarios documented, you can spend time assessing what it will take to be successful in achieving the intended results of the work in each environment and even whether they are still the right results in all the environments. This may guide you to invest in specific approaches or capacities that are likely to be relevant in any scenario and ensuring you have resources set aside to deploy the approaches and capacities most relevant as different scenarios unfold.

Scenario mapping is ideally done with stakeholders who bring a range of perspectives and understanding about the problem and potential solutions and whose strategies to work on the problem differ in significant ways. This diversity decreases the risk of the scenarios being overly focused on a driver that is very relevant only to one definition of the problem or solution, but not universally relevant to the problem.

The Delphi Technique

The purpose of the Delphi Technique is to have experts come to a consensus about the most probable future without risking of groupthink or any one individual overly influencing the group. In addition to reaching a consensus about what the future may look like, the Delphi method has also been used to surface ideas about what the future should look like.

The process begins by having each leader independently map their vision of the future (interviews work well for this). Their collective responses are then summarized and the variations are called out. The summary goes back to the experts and they each reflect on it, revising their view of the future based on insights from others. All of their independent insights are again summarized and variations called out. In an ideal world, this back and forth continues until a consensus view of the future emerges or the changes are no longer significant from one round to another although the process can also be stopped after a pre-defined cut off point (e.g. a set number of rounds).

The result of the Delphi Technique is a description of the future that integrates multiple perspectives and types of expertise. Unlike scenario mapping, it may or may not document multiple futures, but similar to scenario mapping, it pushes the thinking far past the intuitive knowledge we typically bring into a planning process or the biased understanding of talking to one or two experts at a time.

Resources

Better Evaluation provides a nice overview of when and why to use Delphi Technique, but focuses on the quantitative approach, which has participants rank, order, and quantify what they believe is likely to happen in the future, rather than integrate the thinking across multiple participants qualitatively. We strongly encourage you to use the qualitative approach in forecasting for adaptive planning as the results are easier to use and more meaningful.

For more pros and cons on the Delphi Technique review this blog.

Pre-Mortems

Most planning processes are focused on opportunities and we often forget to look at what could go wrong. Pre-mortems are a structured process for examining what we could do better by opening the door to the idea that a plan will fail and allowing for thinking about flaws that would otherwise have been ignored. They can be done in any pre-defined strategy and are particularly useful tools to assess the initial steps of a Strategic Roadmap.

Pre-mortems ask the question: "at the end of this plan, we did everything we said we were going to do, we kept our focus, and we could not have failed more spectacularly, so what went wrong?" The process then asks participants to work through three questions:

- What does failure look like?
- What went wrong along the way to reach such a disastrous outcome and why?
- What was going on in the internal and external environment?
- Given these risks of failure, what can we choose to do differently? How can we adapt our strategy to prevent those things from going wrong?

By being systematic, taking the time to go deep into the failure and find the drivers, and then identifying strategies to address each driver, pre-mortems can help plan for the worst case scenario in the future. Pre-mortems are best used in an adaptive planning process after the results have been documented, the environment explored and initial strategies are planned. At that point, there is enough specification of the strategy to investigate whether it is likely to be successful and refine it.

Resources

Harvard Business Review has a description of how to Perform a Project Pre-mortem, including helpful examples. This resource is not focused on adaptive processes however, so don't get sucked into the idea of believing you can predict the future. You can only predict some problematic drivers of a worst possible future and plan for how to address or prevent them if and when they become an issue.

Exploring Assumptions & Context: Mapping

Where forecasting techniques investigate potential futures and help prepare you to be adaptive as the future unfolds, mapping strategies help investigate what is happening right now. Mapping is powerful in adaptive planning because many mapping techniques will surface patterns of influence, key levers you can pull to cause change on the issue, and/or dynamics in the environment that may undermine or support your work. These then become things you can either actively seek to change or monitor along the way so you are ready to intervene if they become barriers to your intended results.

You may notice that many of these tools pick up elements of a traditional environmental scan; however, they go deeper than many environmental scans. If you are just entering into an issue area, an environmental scan may still be an appropriate approach, as it will provide you with a good 10,000 foot overview of the issue and potential solutions unlike the tools below, which dig deeper into specific aspects of the complex problem and its potential solutions.

Once again, similar to the forecasting methods in this toolkit, many mapping activities may not feel dramatically different from a strategic, thoughtful dialogue about what is happening in the environment. What is different is the level of systematic, rigorous information collection and use that goes into creating the maps and the intentionality of how they are used. They push the learning to another level, drawing on more than intuition surfaced in group dialogues. For that reason, they can be powerful tools for helping planning groups to take their process to the next level.

Resources

The Systems Grantmaking Resource Guide from GEO is an exciting tool, which offers the ability to sort through a variety of systems tools and resources, including mapping techniques, to identify which tools work best in different settings.

Systems Mapping

Systems mapping is a structured method for representing a system and all its complexity, focusing on visually mapping how people and organizations relate. Systems maps are particularly useful when you need to surface beliefs about how change will occur, identify new avenues for change, or know where to monitor the environment for the expected and unexpected changes resulting from an intervention.

Systems maps can focus on relationships of many types, from how different organizations influence each other to how larger systems such as communities, private market, local government, etc. influence each other. Systems maps can also include intangibles, such as political climates or norms around accepting government assistance. In the context of adaptive planning, the type of map most that is useful is described as an issue systems map. Regardless of what types of tangible and intangible elements are on your map, the goal is to surface the levers by which you can cause change on your issue and to help you articulate the boundaries of your problem, so you aren't overwhelmed by the idea of having to solve everything.

Systems maps can partner very effectively with Strategic Roadmaps. When a systems map is undertaken, it can surface major drivers of the problem, thus identifying important places to intervene. The Strategic Roadmap can help you break down what change would look like in that point on the map.

Resources

For a fascinating example of a systems map that contains both tangible and intangible examples, visit the Hewlett Foundation's causal loop diagram of how to influence change in Congress to create an environment where members can deliberate, negotiate and compromise.

For a quick read that outlines different types of systems maps and gives helpful examples, check out Innovation Network's Spotlight on Systems Mapping.

Network Mapping

Social network analysis is the mapping and measurement of relationships between people or organizations. It is useful when there are uncertainties or concerns about how the network of people or organizations will or are functioning, such as how information flows or where trust needs to be built.

At its most simple level, network analysis is documenting the presence and absence of different types of relationships. The questions you ask determine the type of relationship you will document, from relationships based on shared action to trust to sitting at the same collaborative tables together.

While there can be great value in network mapping, many network maps are attractive visuals that provide little new or useful information. This is because the relationships are quite often not very different from your current expectations of how they will function. For a network map to be useful in adaptive planning, you need to think about how you hope to influence the networks and overlay other information that helps explain the network.

For example, in a network map of advocates working on healthcare access, questions about the extent to which the organizations prioritized health equity were included along with questions on the types of advocacy capacity in each organization. This allowed the network map to surface that the core of the advocacy network has ample capacity to influence decision-makers, but less capacity to engage the public. The core of the advocacy network lacks the equity frame and consistent reach of the organizations on the far periphery of the network. Without these overlays, the learning would be limited to knowing some organizations are less connected than others and identifying the most connected advocates, both things that intuitively anyone in that field of advocates could have told you.

Resources

For a brief introduction to social network analysis, visit orgnet.com, a website dedicated to the method that provides straight forward examples.

Power/Influence Mapping

Power mapping is a tool to visualize relationships among people and organizations and to assess the relative impact of these pathways. It is particularly powerful when there is uncertainty around the best avenues of potential influence over specific decision-makers. When the issue you're trying to tackle includes influencing key individuals or institutions, understanding what it will take to have that influence can be invaluable.

For example, if you are trying to influence a governor's choices during the budget process, you would assess all the organizations and individuals who are likely to have an effect on her decision. In the process, you want to be both creative (think beyond usual systems players), be strategic (consider the range of constituency groups, donors, or others) and thorough (include personal and professional influences). From there, you explore the power of the relationships – what direction does the influence go, how strong do you think it may be?

With this map in hand, you can identify specific points of influence (e.g. media or the legislative planning and budget agency) that could have an impact on the Governor's choices and where you have influence yourself. You can also extend this map outward two or three steps if you find you don't have access and influence over any of the decision-makers immediate influencers.

Resources

The DFA Training Academy has a great guide to Power Mapping that is at the individual decision-maker level.

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Stakeholder Mapping

Stakeholder mapping is another tool that helps in understanding the relationships of individuals to the issue, but which are focused on examining what is underlying the stakeholders' engagement in the issue: it is a method for understanding the stake people have in an effort and how that might affect the work.

When completing a stakeholder map, it is often helpful to generate an initial list and then ask for help completing the list from some of the stakeholders you named. The lists include not just the stakeholder type/name, but also why they have a stake in the issue, how they are related to or dependent on each other, and the roles they are taking in your process or intended process. Stakeholder mapping can be a powerful tool to use prior to a simulation exercise, so help the simulation stay grounded in the reality of each stakeholder's reasons for being part of solving the problem.

Resources

BetterEvaluation.Com's Stakeholder Mapping & Analysis page has a straight forward, short description of stakeholder mapping processes along with links out to other useful resources.

Developing Strategies: The Process

After all of the work to map intended results from the strategy and learn about the past, present and future environments, what do you do with all of this good information?

The strategy planning process has to integrate the learning and key its focus on the results. The ultimate strategy needs to incorporate three things:

- Long-term overarching approach, so you can appropriately allocate resources.
- Short-term strategies relevant in the current environment to get to the earliest preconditions on your Strategic Roadmap.
- Ongoing strategies to collect information about the environment and take time to reflect and adapt as needed, including leaving additional resources available for adaptation.

Setting Your Focus

The meeting where you design your adaptive strategy typically begins with the Strategic Roadmap front and center along with easily accessible information from the various other activities you've undertaken. You then take time to clarify the road ahead – which elements of the roadmap are your priorities, and which make more sense for others to tackle or for your group to tackle in future years. In the narrowing process, you can consider things like:

- Which parts of the Strategic Roadmap are the right size for you to address, given your capacity, resources and timeline?
- Which parts of the Strategic Roadmap intersect the most with your current networks and spheres of influence? (informed by Social Network Analysis and/or Influence Mapping)
- Are there parts of the Strategic Roadmap that are fundamental to everything else being possible?
- Are there parts of the Strategic Roadmap that no one else is tackling? (informed by an Environmental Scan)
- Are there parts of the Strategic Roadmap that will not move forward without a more intentional, coordinated effort?
- Are there parts of the Strategic Roadmap that remain relevant across multiple future scenarios? (informed by Scenario Mapping)

Once you have agreed on the strategic focus for your work, you can consider how you would approach the work. For each area on the Strategic Roadmap within your focus, you can:

- Break down the preconditions more fully, e.g. going from all producers meeting food safety requirements to: addressing gaps with reimbursement; producers having the necessary knowledge; and accurate interpretation of food safety regulations.
- Choose to remain vaguer about the smaller changes, under the belief that the partners implementing of your work will know more about what it takes to get to the precondition (a common approach in funding strategies, giving grantees greater flexibility).

Planning for the Long Term

With the focus set and a decisions made about how nuanced you want your preconditions to be, the next step is to craft the specific actions you can take.

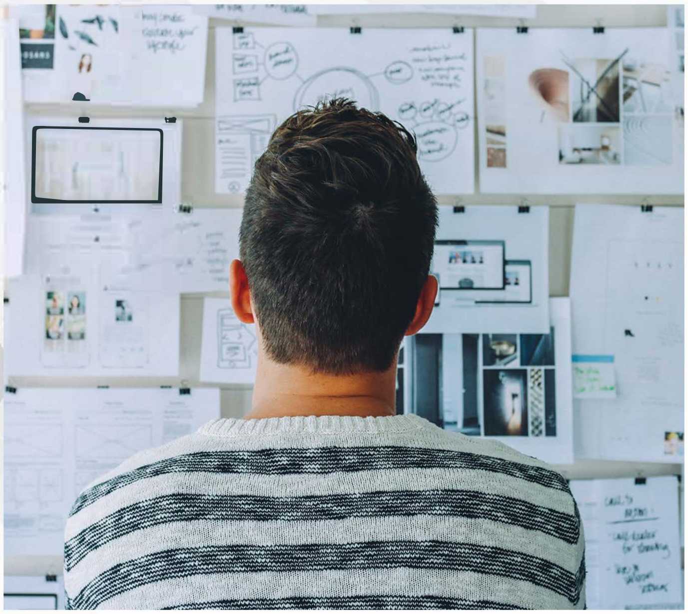
We like a tool called Before Action Reviews that walk the participants through the process of thinking about the what the result will really look like on the ground when it is achieved, what challenges might be to getting there, what they have learned from past experience, and then (and only then!), what they can do to get to the intended results. During the reflection on challenges and past experience, you can bring in what you've learned through forecasting, mapping or other techniques for bringing in new information. This flow keeps the participants focused on the results, rather than diving deep into the how-to of the planning process, but still gives an opportunity to get to specific actions. After Action Reviews provide a structure for learning from what you implemented to identify areas of improvement and opportunities to test what you learned. In this sense, these two processes act as "bookends" so you can be deliberate about preparing for and learning from important activities along the way.

Whether you use these techniques or another process, the important part of this stage of planning is not to get into nitty-gritty details. Do not develop goals, objectives, strategies and tactics! Rather, develop a clear, high-level focus on the preconditions and understanding of what it might take to get there.

Whether you use these techniques or another process, the important part of this stage of planning is not to get into nitty-gritty details. Do not develop goals, objectives, strategies and tactics! Rather, develop a clear, high-level focus on the preconditions and understanding of what it might take to get there.

Resources

For an understanding of Before and After Action Reviews, Learning in the Thick of It by Marilyn Darling, Charles Parry and Joseph Moore provides a great preview of how to use them.



Planning for the Short Term

Now that you have a long-term vision and high level plan, it's time to get into the weeds. You can plan for short-term actions that help achieve the earliest preconditions on your Strategic Roadmap. Unlike planning for the long-term, these might be very specific actions to be taken by defined players within a specific timeframe. Before Action Reviews are equally relevant for shorter term planning. The only difference is the first part – describing your intended result.

By the time you're done with short-term planning, you have a clear action plan to advance the earliest stages of the Strategic Roadmap and can see the relationship between this work and the long-term road ahead.

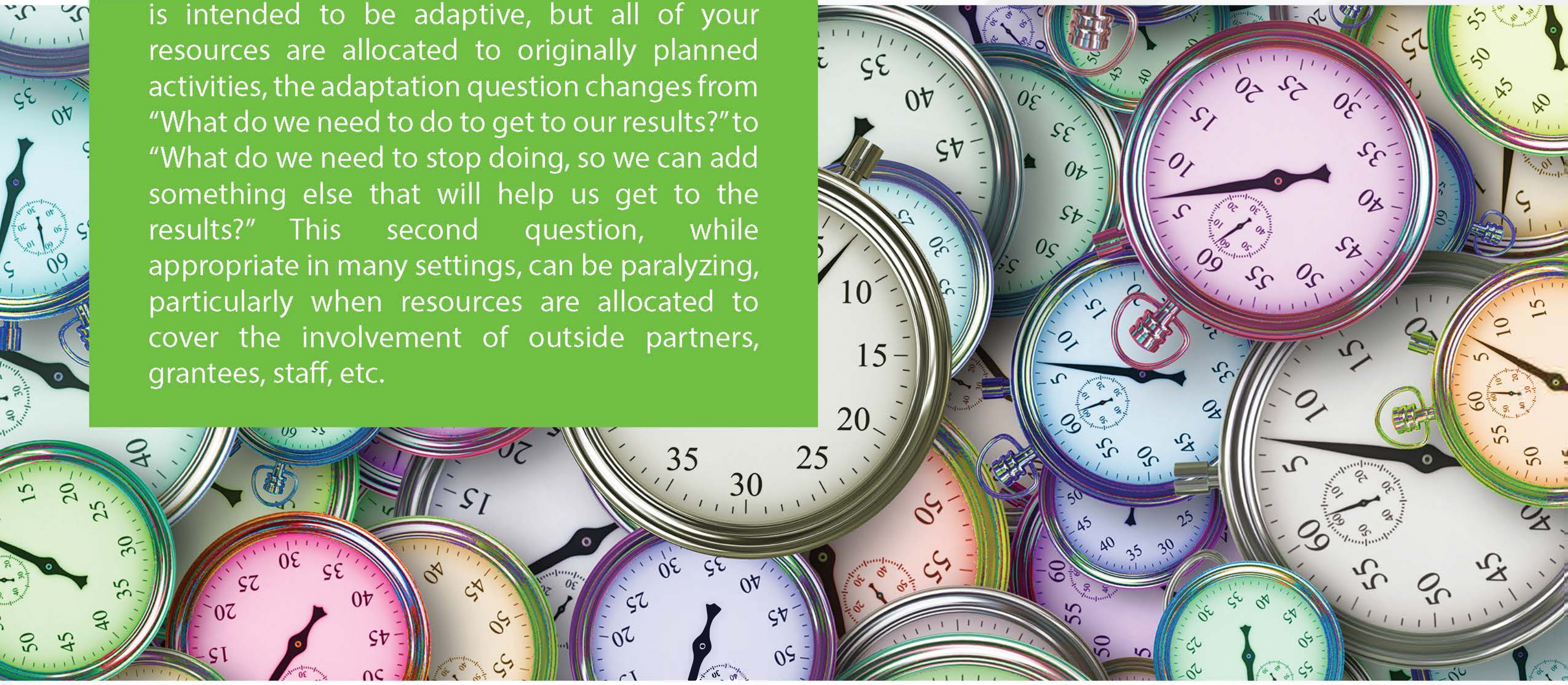
Planning for Being Adaptive

For today, adaptive planning processes also need to plan which tools and processes will facilitate ongoing adaptation in response to learning, changing context, or shifting assumptions.

This typically includes a combination of:

- Ways of gathering information about the results of your work – are you seeing the changes you thought you could influence, how did you contribute to the changes, what didn't go as expected?
- Ways of gathering information about the environment and testing your assumptions – is a different scenario unfolding, have the networks of organizations shifted over time, what are the reactions stakeholders are having to key events?
- Ways of using the information that is gathered – when do we have key decision points where we can integrate new learning and what type of facilitated dialogue will help us use the information?
- Resources to allocate to changes in plan – what funding, staff time or other resources have we left available to apply to new strategies that emerge along the way?

This combination prepares the strategy to be intentionally and systematically adaptive, responding to multiple sources of information, applying new resources as needed. The issue of having dedicated resources for supporting adaptation is critical. If you have a strategy that is intended to be adaptive, but all of your resources are allocated to originally planned activities, the adaptation question changes from "What do we need to do to get to our results?" to "What do we need to stop doing, so we can add something else that will help us get to the results?" This second question, while appropriate in many settings, can be paralyzing, particularly when resources are allocated to cover the involvement of outside partners, grantees, staff, etc.



Adaptive Planning Measures & Metrics

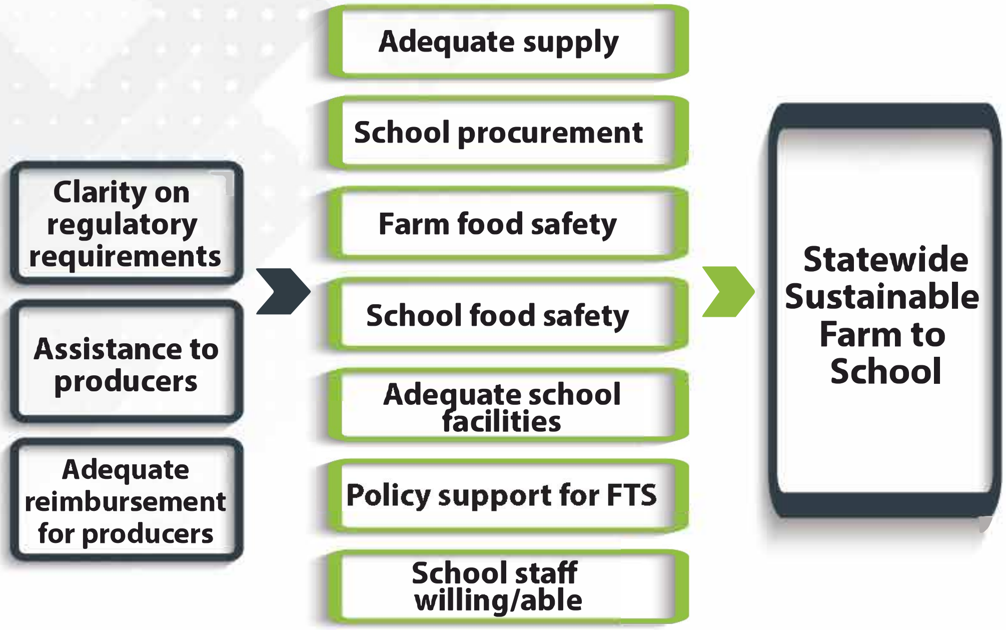
Many strategic plans come with some form of measures and metrics to monitor progress. Adaptive plans can do the same, but the measures and metrics should look different.

Rather than having pre-defined timelines and deliverables that stretch across multiple years, an adaptive planning process should hold itself accountable to the preconditions that are tackled each year and the learning that occurs throughout the year.

Using the Farm to School Example, the monitoring of progress for year one might focus on the extent to which the collaborative group has been able to influence clarity on regulatory requirements, assistance to producers, and adequate reimbursement for producers. By year two, if those preconditions have been successfully influenced, the monitoring of progress might look for evidence of improved on farm food safety.

In addition to monitoring the preconditions, a strong monitoring and evaluation approach will help observe the environment and how it is changing over time. Using the Farm to School example:

- If your scenario mapping revealed that changes in state and federal policy will be a major driver of the food safety environment, you might monitor both of those specific to food safety or reimbursement levels.
- If you did a simulation on what influences the behavior of school district purchasers related to trust in the safety of local farm foods, you might have surfaced the impact of the media on beliefs about whether food is safe. In that case, you would monitor the framing in the media around food safety issues and whether any major or minor food safety crises have emerged.
- If your pre-mortem on the strategy suggested that producer availability is one of the major challenges in this work, you might also monitor the weather, to be realistic about whether producers are having a growing season where they can add additional workload to their plate (e.g. going to on farm food safety trainings) or whether this is a difficult year for producers.



SPARK INSIGHT PARTNERS
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Community Pages: Case Studies

Welcome to the Community Pages of the Adaptive Planning Toolkit. The pages in this section have been created by partners who want to share their experiences with adaptive planning. Please contact us if you're interested in contributing to the Community Pages.

Adaptive Planning Process to Design an Advocacy Funding Strategy

Flexible enough so grantees could respond to unanticipated events, including changes in the political environment, while still allowing for accountability. The Foundation also needed to be able to redeploy resources on their end without creating instability for their grantees.

To address these dilemmas, the Foundation engaged Spark Policy Institute, and consultants Tanya Beer and Pilar Stella, to support development of a funding strategy that could remain relevant and strategic over time in such a complex environment.

The Foundation used three forward-thinking tools to explore the strategy in order to develop their grantmaking approach:

1. **Participatory mapping**
of advocacy and funding strategies used by Colorado funders to assess where there were gaps;

2. **Pre-mortem**
designed to surface the many ways health reform implementation could play out and in what possible political environments; and

3. **Engaging in strategy and action planning:**
analysis of the preliminary strategy design, to refine the strategy.

1) Participatory Mapping

The Foundation worked with other funders to get an idea of the types of advocacy activities supported in the state. After interviews with the funders, Spark created a matrix of each foundation's advocacy strategies, which showed the landscape of advocacy funding – the types of funding strategies, what was funded, and how foundations defined advocates. The matrix was then shared with the funders and together they used an adapted version of the Center for Evaluation Innovation's Policy & Advocacy Matrix to map the collective focus of their funding. This map was used to talk about the advocacy field and its capacity to respond to the shifting environment, helping the Foundation see how their strategy could best support the field, including how they could partner with other funders.

2) Scenario Planning

Given the rapidly shifting health policy environment, scenario planning was a critical step in developing the Foundation's funding strategy. The Foundation engaged over 40 advocates across the state who, through a mix of large and small group conversations, identified that the two primary drivers that will shape the health policy landscape in Colorado are the political composition of state government and how health reform is implemented. These two drivers were then crossed, creating a matrix of possible futures. For each scenario, participants looked at which policy priorities would be the most important to protecting or advancing the Foundation's goals and which strategies will be needed; who will have a credible voice and can influence policymakers; and what strategies and skills will be needed regardless of what the future holds. This focus on the policy priorities and advocacy strategies identified as relevant regardless of which future unfolds allowed the Foundation to build a stable core strategy so it was clear that these are the goals both the Foundation and advocates are working towards no matter what happens. It also highlighted which strategies might be important in different scenarios, allowing the Foundation to set provisional priorities and strategies for the current and most likely futures.

3) Pre-Mortem

The final step was a "pre-mortem" on the preliminary strategy design to identify risks of failure so ways of mitigating these risks can be built into the strategy design. The design team was asked to imagine that it was four years into the future and the strategy had failed spectacularly. The group then identified internal and external risks, and then developed specific strategies to respond to the internal risks, such as the long attention span needed to support a four-year strategy (especially as the strategy was new to the Foundation); balancing the need for both consistency and adaptation; and the potential lack of support and engagement from and by advocates). To account for these risks, the Foundation and Spark built in a plan for addressing them, including, but not limited to, learning throughout the strategy, how to engage key leadership in an "adaptive mindset", and communications throughout the life of the strategy. Importantly, these activities are not viewed as separate from the strategy; they are considered part of the strategy.

The Final Strategy

The final strategy took into account the learning from the three future-facing planning activities and was designed to maximize flexibility for both the Foundation and advocates, while allowing for the stability needed for a long-term commitment and the accountability required by the Foundation leadership. It also included learning tools for participatory monitoring of the external environment in case a shift in strategy is needed and tools to ensure this learning is used to shape the strategy in the future. For more information about the strategy, visit the Consumer Advocacy Funding Opportunity.

Creating Change Agents through Adaptive Planning

Public policy groups, especially a legislatively-mandated Council, Task Force, or Blue Ribbon Commission, may have hefty mandates and a short timeframe to assess and respond to an issue. Often, the outcomes of these groups is a report that sits on a shelf. However, when these groups undertake a strategic planning process –focused on action around necessary conditions, leveraging partners, and identifying the gaps that they then fill – they can become change agents.

One example of a change-oriented group is the Colorado Farm to School Task Force – a 13 member appointed body enacted by the Colorado legislature in 2010. At their first staffed meeting in February 2011, the Task Force was guided through a Strategic Road-mapping process. They:

1. Began by identifying the end-of-the-road or where they wanted the state of Colorado to be in 15 years.
2. Identified the two possible ways ("conditions") by which farm to school could be implemented – either (1) Colorado schools & producers work directly together or (2) Colorado producers sell to a food hub that sells to schools.
3. Identified the numerous "preconditions" necessary to implement farm to school. Preconditions are the bridges on the road – without them, you cannot get to the other side of the river where your destination lies.
4. Identified exactly which organizations were doing what to build each of the needed bridges.
5. When all the activities were connected to each bridge, the nuts and bolts and even entire girders of a bridge that were missing became apparent. It is the missing parts of the bridges (the "gaps") that became the work of the Task Force.

As a result of this process, the group has been effectively working in concert with each other over the last five years to bring "collaborative, sustainable implementation of farm to school statewide". The Task Force, which is all volunteer, has had a number of notable accomplishments since their inception, including being reauthorized in 2013 with two additional seats and acquiring federal and foundation grants to continue and expand their work.

Show me the impact

The TF runs like a well-oiled machine. Everyone keeps on task, following the roadmap action step by action step. In its first year alone, the TF:

- Provided outreach and technical assistance by request to schools, producers and communities around the state interested in starting or expanding FTS efforts and supported the development of direct technical assistance to schools and producers, including hosting conferences and releasing FAQs and a 50-state legislative scan.
- Supported pilot projects by helping stakeholders define and refine five food hub projects, and helped to locate funding sources and advocate for financial support.
- Conducted quarterly meetings around the state to learn about the needs of different regions. In 2011, the Task Force met in Pueblo, San Luis Valley, Longmont and Denver.
- Developed a Farm to School Grant Template to provide assistance to schools to find funding and apply for grants to buy equipment and upgrade kitchen facilities.
- Designed the Farm to School Information Hub Website, a centralized, sustainable information hub, connects the many different farm to school related resources in one easy to navigate website
- Received a major grant from the Colorado Health Foundation to support its 2012 activities.

Where is the Task Force now?

The Task Force now has 15 appointed members and 10 ex-officios ranging in expertise from school food service to food distribution to legal analysis. Colorado is now seen as a leader in farm to school nationwide, in large part due to the work of the Task Force. States around the country contact the Task Force for guidance on how to start up or improve upon their FTS efforts and the Task Force has developed strong local and national partnerships that have brought new resources to Colorado's efforts. In the past few years, the Task Force has been involved in a variety of activities from the grassroots to the policy level, including:

Creating easy-to-understand policy & regulatory analysis and guidance, such as documents and webinars on topics including food safety, legislative trends, grant opportunities, and the health and economic impacts of locally-sourced foods.

Continuing to provide local and national outreach & technical assistance, presenting and participating in local, regional, statewide, and national conferences and presentations, including the USDA FTS Grantee National Gathering and the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference and offering FTS Intensive Technical Assistance (ITA) Workshops to communities throughout the state (through a three year grant from the Gates Family Foundation).

Supporting and promoting pilot projects as a method of investing in innovation and expansion of FTS efforts in Colorado.

Developing evaluation tools, such as the Farm to School Evaluation Toolkit, a resource to help FTS programs of all sizes undertake evaluation, which provides step-by-step guidance and data collection tools to assess FTS outcomes related to students, parents, teachers, food service staff and operations, producers, school leadership, and community.

Looking to the future

The Task Force will again re-visit their Strategic Roadmap at their upcoming June meeting to refine the strategic plan for the next year, which will involve re-capping what they have done and identifying the gaps they have yet to address. This process will immediately lead to creation of working groups, a helpful vehicle used by the Task Force to actually get the work done. Previous work groups have been created, accomplished their tasks, and have been dissolved, creating momentum and allowing for flexibility when new gaps and needs arise.

To learn more about the work of the Colorado Farm to School Task Force, and to see their most recent Strategic Roadmap, please visit their website at: coloradofarmtoschool.org

APPENDICES

Pre-Mortem Tool

One of the things that makes an adaptive planning process fundamentally different from other types of planning is the assumption that many different futures are possible, and you need to be prepared for, or able to, adapt in response to what emerges. In order to be prepared, it is important to take the time to explore the potential futures ahead.

DESCRIPTION OF TOOL:

Unlike a critiquing session where you discuss what might go wrong, a pre-mortem asks what did go wrong. A pre-mortem comes at the beginning of a planning process, rather than the end. The goal is to generate plausible reasons for failure and to make improvements before they happen. Pre-mortem analysis can be used on small to large scale planning process that could have a major impact on the organization either financially, politically, or culturally.

PURPOSE OF TOOL:

Most planning processes are focused on opportunities, as a result, we often forget to look at what could go wrong. This tool provides a structured process for examining potential failures. They are particularly useful tools to assess the initial steps of a Strategic Roadmap. Pre-mortems are best used in an adaptive planning process after the results have been documented, the environment explored, and initial strategies are planned. At that point, there is enough specification of the strategy to investigate potential failures.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF TOOL:

Continuous Values:

By generating potential failures, one can also see the value in solving problems before they occur. When you encourage yourself or your team to write down as many possible failures you are assessing why the solution you've chosen wouldn't have worked. Doing so might uncover an unexpected flaw or it may encourage you to further refine your idea and make it more effective. Continuous values allow us to focus on trying new strategies, while ensuring adjustments and revisions occur continuously and are of importance.

Responsive Exploration:

Gathering external information or systematically mining your own thinking to collect additional information is necessary to help you consider areas you might fail. This exploration of information could focus on mapping the current environment and sources of influence or forecast the future environment influenced by social, technological, economic, political, or environmental changes. Responsive exploration stresses the importance in understanding the context and assumptions that might lead to failure.

Data-Driven:

By stressing the importance of collecting and interpreting any data and metrics from similar projects completed in the past, you can assess any areas that may lead to failure. Given a knowledge and understanding of the specific risks or failures can help guide you to identify strategies to address each area of need or weakness. Data-driven stances provide a factual backing for the assumptions and potential failures being made.

What does failure look like?	What went wrong along the way to reach such a disastrous outcome and why?	What was going on in the internal and external environment?	Given these risks of failure, what can we choose to do differently?	How can we adapt our strategy to prevent those things from going wrong?

Pre-mortems ask the question: “at the end of this plan, we did everything we said we were going to do, we kept our focus, and we could not have failed more spectacularly, so what went wrong?” By being systematic, taking the time to go deep into the failure and find the drivers, and then identifying strategies to address each driver, pre-mortems can help plan for the worst case scenario in the future.

Are you interested in more tips and tools for strategic learning for complex problems?

Spark Insight Partner’s (www.sparkinsight.com) Strategic Learning Toolkit is available at https://sparkinsight.com/courses/the-strategic-learning-toolkit/. Please share your stories about strategic learning for complex problems, your tools, and access tools and ideas from other organizations.

Pre-Mortem Instructions & Template

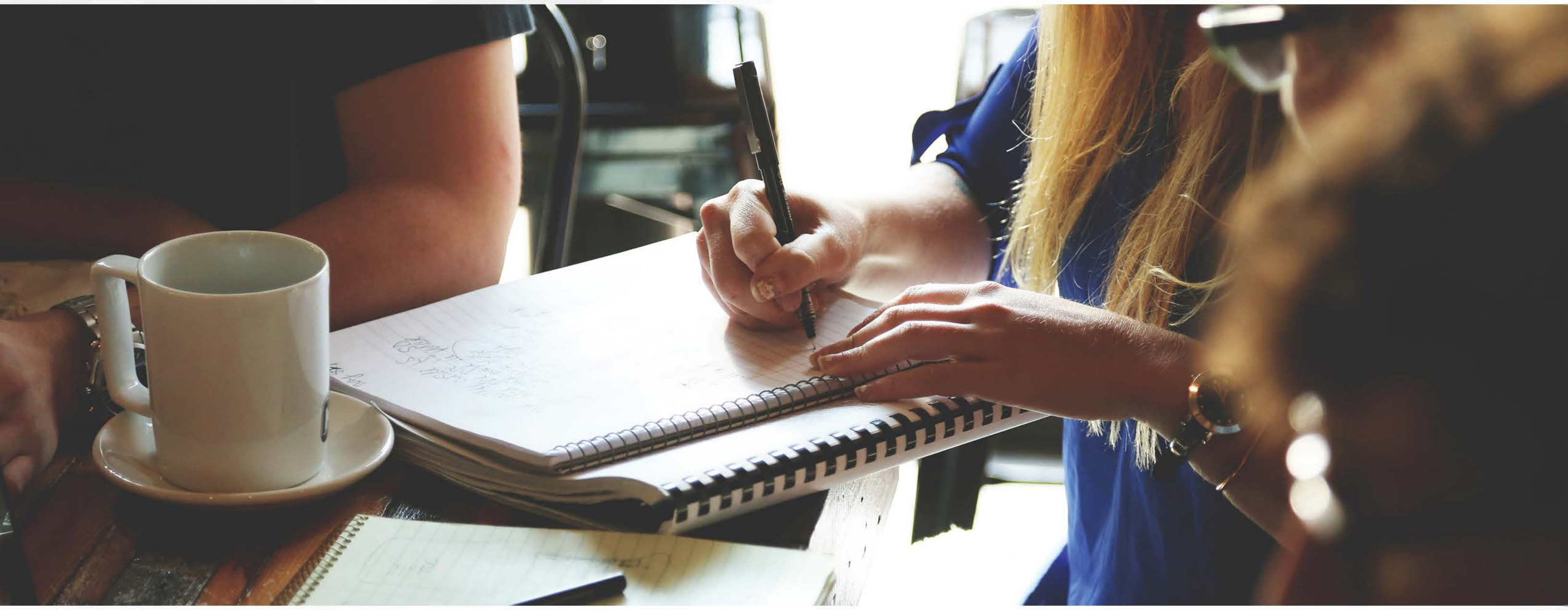
Framing Statement: Begin the discussion with a statement tailored to the context, such as: "It's two years from now. The plan (strategy, approach, etc.) has been fully implemented. It failed spectacularly!!! It didn't achieve its outcomes, people are frustrated, and it's even beginning to affect the organization/program/initiative's overall reputation."

Facilitation: Have the group describe failure very clearly and concretely (Part 1) across a variety of dimensions – e.g., internal processes, external stakeholders, outcomes (both intended and unintended).

Have the group name the drivers of the different dimensions of failure (Part 2). These might be things within their control or environmental factors. Make sure they identify drivers for each of the different dimensions of failure identified during Part 1.

After failure is clearly described and drivers are identified, move into strategies to decrease the risk of failure (Part 3). These typically include a mix of actions that can be taken today, changes in the plan to ensure actions are taken later, and ways of monitoring what is emerging so proactive responses can be crafted as risks of failure emerge down the line. Again, make sure each of the drivers and descriptors of failure has an associated action.

Part 1: What does failure look like?	Part 2: Why did it happen?	Part 3: What can we do to decrease the risk of failure?



Pre-Mortem Example: a funding strategy

Below is an example of the types of insights generated during each part of the dialogue. This example represents how notes are assembled after the fact. The dialogue itself will be a bit messier, with elements from Parts 1, 2, and 3 not aligning in as organized of a fashion as can be constructed after the fact.

Framing Statement: It's four years from now. The advocacy funding strategy that represented a significant new approach for the foundation failed spectacularly. It not only failed to achieve its outcomes, it has affected the reputation and credibility of the foundation.

Part 1: What does failure look like?	Part 2: Why did it happen?	Part 3: What can we do decrease the risk of failure?
• Limited or no policy wins • Policy opportunities/windows that failed to be leveraged • Low value policy wins that don't advance the overall policy targets	• Grantees and foundation misinterpreted the environment – went after the wrong wins • The strategy adapted too much or only paid lip service to adaptation – at either/both the grantee and foundation level	• High quality and participatory monitoring of environment • Strategies/timeline for actively questioning level of adaptation with internal and external partners
• Grantees push back on the approach and never fully participate	• Grantees never bought into the new approach • Grantees didn't trust the foundation's focus on adaptation and learning • Turnover of key leaders that support approach from within the advocacy field	• Ongoing re-education of leaders among grantees and the advocacy field more broadly • Building multiple supporters of the strategy within each advocacy organization
• Foundation changes course – failed to keep the strategy moving forward as intended	• The foundation failed to integrate the different approach into current practice, leading to it being an ongoing complication/burden to staff • Turnover of key leaders that support the approach from within the foundation	• Intentional steps to institutionalize the new approach within the foundation • Ongoing engagement and re-education of leaders in the foundation • Multi-disciplinary Core Team within the foundation to lead the strategy

Are you interested in more tips and tools for data-informed planning for complex problems?

Spark Insight Partner's (www.sparkinsight.com) interactive Data as a Tool for Change Toolkit is available at https://sparkinsight.com/courses/data-as-a-tool-for-change/. Please share your stories about data, your tools, and access tools and ideas from other organizations.

Strategic Roadmap Tool

Strategic Roadmaps are a powerful tool for taking a complex problem and breaking down the solution into a series of meaningful, smaller changes. They are a backwards planning process in which we define the big change we want to see and then define the smaller changes that will lead to that big change.

Description of Tool:

Strategic Roadmaps are created through a set of specific steps, addressed on the following page. It is important to keep in mind that you will need to adapt the roadmap to where your group is at in the process

Purpose of Tool:

Strategic Roadmaps are a powerful starting place for an adaptive planning process. Once you have one, you can integrate learning about the context/environment and design short-term strategies to tackle the earlier changes along the road. You can also predict the higher-level strategies likely to be needed over the longer term, knowing they are likely to need adaptation. Strategic Roadmaps are also tools for telling the story of your work. They are also a powerful prioritizing tool.

Key Principles of Tool:

Collaborative Insight

Roadmaps require collaboration. Not just between a few key people, but from anyone who will be impacted by the end results. It is not necessarily easy to gather everyone's viewpoints, and not every suggestion will become part of the roadmap, but it certainly helps drive a consensus across the board. Roadmaps need to account for all business goals, across all departments, and require everyone to be working towards the same common goal.

Communication Tool

Within that framework of breaking down a large or complex problem into smaller changes, a roadmap should be viewed as a communication tool. Because the team's input is essential to the actualization of goals, a strategic roadmap should be viewed as adaptable and grounded in strategies that can help you grow the communication of your team by showing the value each person can add.

Vision Building:

In a literal sense, strategic roadmaps should be made visual so they can be grasped intuitively by anyone looking at them. In a figurative sense, before addressing the roadmap, you need to discuss the company's vision. This is crucial for making sure everyone is moving in the same direction and that everyone is working towards a common goal.

Tips for Facilitating Dialogue:

- Keep the dialogue moving steadily and productively, making sure everyone can participate fully.
- Don't let the group get hung up on any one part of the strategic roadmap
    - Move on if they are stuck in a specific precondition or even can't agree on the end-of-the-road. You can always come back to it.
- Avoid being the bad guy!
    - Ask participants to name when they hear something being suggested that is within the groups control (a strategy) rather than a change in the world (a precondition).
- Create space for individual reflection, such as having each person write down a critical precondition themselves or reflect on the overall visual to think about how to reorder it.
    - Use round robins to make sure everyone can join in the conversation.

Guiding Questions and Things to Consider	
Steps 1. Background Work: Identify the right participants/ stakeholders.	Are participants/stakeholders … • Invested in small-level strategic choices? • Invested in high-level strategic choices? • Aware or have a rough sense of the plan? • Entirely bought-in on the implementation of the plan? • Aware of the type of work required for the plan? o Programmatic work, influencing policy, community engagement

Step 2: Facilitate Dialogue: Identify the end-of-the-road (EOR).	• What is the meaningful change you are looking to create?
	   o Once broadly identified, refine, and finalize the EOR.
	• Does the EOR represent the "why bother" of the work?
	• What are the immediate preconditions needed to reach the EOR?
	   o Consider change today vs. changes near the EOR.
	• What assumptions are being made about how change can occur?
	   o Have participants investigate this question individually.

Step 3: Refine the Visual: Identify a visual that can constantly be revised	Make an electronic version and consider…
	• Does it summarize all information?
	   o Does it combine all information in a logical understandable way?
	• Does it simplify all information in a coherent way?
	   o Would someone new to the roadmap be able to make sense of it?
	• Is this version easily adaptable and capable of later revisions?

Step 4: Operationalize the Strategic Roadmap: Identify Strategies	• What are the long-term overarching approaches?
	   o How can we appropriately allocate resources?
	• What are the short-term, relevant strategies?
	   o How are they relevant in the current environment?
	   o How can they get you to the earliest preconditions on your Strategic Roadmap?
	• What are the ongoing strategies?
	   o How can they collect information about the environment?
	   o Remember to take time to reflect and adapt as needed, including leaving additional resources available for adaptation

Step 5: Review: Identify time for revisions	Are participants/stakeholders… • Constantly scanning their environment? • Assessing the effectiveness of their strategies?

Are you interested in more tips and tools for evaluating complex problems?

Spark Insight Partner's (www.sparkinsight.com) interactive Developmental Evaluation Toolkit is available at https://sparkinsight.com/courses/developmental-evaluation-toolkit. Please share your stories about evaluation, your tools, and access tools and ideas from other organizations.

Developing a Strategic Roadmap: Process and Tip

When developing a strategic roadmap, someone has to take the role of the facilitator or "critical friend" and challenge the assumptions being made and keep the focus on identifying preconditions that will be useful for planning purposes.

1 In your facilitation role, keep the dialogue moving steadily and productively, making sure everyone can participate fully. Below are a few tips to help with this

Begin with the end-of-the-road and then ask: What are the conditions that must be in place to achieve that end-of-the-road?

Keep things moving – don't let the group get hung up on any one part of the strategic roadmap – e.g. move on if they are stuck in a specific precondition or even can't agree on the end-of-the-road. You can always come back to it.

Avoid being the bad guy! Ask participants to name when they hear something being suggested that is within the groups control (a strategy) rather than a change in the world (a precondition).

Create space for individual reflection, such as having each person write down a critical precondition themselves

2 Ask questions to confirm the preconditions are truly changes in the world that are outside the planning group's control.

Does the end-of-the-road represent the "why bother" of the work?

Does each precondition represent something outside the "control" of the project?

Are there a variety of possible routes to achieving the preconditions?

3 Ask questions to confirm the preconditions are the right preconditions.

Are they fundamentally necessary in order to get to the end-of-the-road?

Intuitively, do they make sense in the order they are included?

Is there any evidence to suggest they are the right preconditions? (research, past experience, evaluations)

4 Ask questions to confirm the preconditions are preconditions staged in the way they are most likely to occur.

Does one precondition logically lead to another?

Is there anything significant that would need to occur before a precondition is possible? (this should be added to the roadmap)

Are you interested in more tips and tools for strategic desicion-making for complex problems?

Spark Insight Partner's (www.sparkinsight.com) interactive Complex Decision-Making Toolkit is available at https://sparkinsight.com/courses/tools-for-complex-decision-making/. Please share your stories about decision-making, your tools, and access tools and ideas from other organizations.

Before Action Review (BAR)

When developing a strategic roadmap, someone has to take the role of the facilitator or "critical friend" and challenge the assumptions being made and keep the focus on identifying preconditions that will be useful for planning purposes.

What is our intended result? *Review goals, mission, and vision. Ensure there is a clear, shared, intent.*	
What are our success measurements? *In the AAR you will use this question to compare intended results with actual results. Your measures should be both quantitative and qualitative.*	
What challenges will we face? *Review context and assumptions and any potential drivers, internal or external, that could impact reaching end results.*	
What did we learn from last time? *Discuss lessons learned and identify next steps to address each difficulty. Consider what will make us successful next time.*	
What will make us successful this time? *Think through additional plans or activities that will help you achieve your results.*	

After Action Review (AAR)

When developing a strategic roadmap, someone has to take the role of the facilitator or "critical friend" and challenge the assumptions being made and keep the focus on identifying preconditions that will be useful for planning purposes.

What is our intended result? *Review your BAR.*	
What were our actual results? *Discussion should mirror intent and success measures from BAR.*	
What caused our results? *Attempt to understand the causes that let you reach your results.*	
What lessons should we take forward? *Highlight three key insights and ideas.*	

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