

# Innovation *insights*

OFFICE OF PLANNING AND  
Institutional Assessment

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<http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/innovation/>

## Integrating Planning, Assessment, and Improvement

How can an organization decide which goals and strategies to include in a plan? How can specific strategies be implemented? While it's generally accepted that there is value in planning, one of the most common complaints made about plans is that they are written and placed on a shelf. This Innovation Insight explains the five step model used for integrating planning, assessment, and improvement at Penn State, and how this model can be useful in answering these questions. An overview is also provided of data sources and tools that can be used at each step of the model, with references for each tool. (Note: These are not exhaustive lists and many tools can be used at more than one place in the model.) A survey that units can use to assess where they are in integrating planning, assessment, and improvement is also included.

### Background

Many organizations use planning, improvement, and assessment to help their organization advance and succeed. Developing plans, whether they be for one to three years or fifteen to twenty, is an accepted and expected organizational activity. Process improvement is practiced to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and returns on limited resources. Assessing or measuring performance is used to indicate how well an organization is doing. But often, within a single organization, these activities are being undertaken separately, by separate units, with no cross-communication or feedback that would make it possible for one activity to support, reinforce, or enable another. Penn State's model for integrating planning, assessment, and improvement provides a means to: move plans off the shelf and into the weekly and daily scheduling and prioritizing process; move assessment from an ending score to a guide for future actions and goals; and move process improvement, innovation, and reengineering from isolated events to a means to implement a plan.

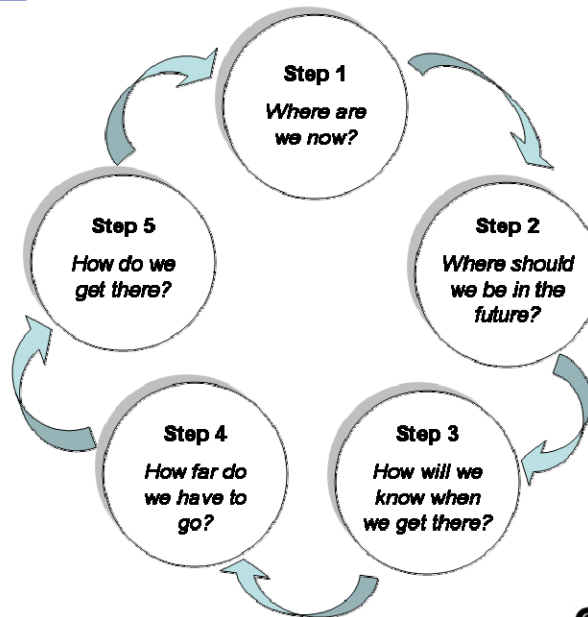
### The Basic Model

Penn State's model for integrating planning, assessment, and improvement describes a continuous process that includes data from many sources in the planning and improvement activities. The model begins with Step 1, a data based assessment of where the organization is currently. This is followed by Step 2 in which the organization develops, confirms, or updates its mission, vision, and goals. In Step 3 the unit identifies measures for each of the goals and related outcomes. Then, by examining the gaps between where the organization is and where it wants to be, based on the data collected and the measures developed earlier, in Step 4 the organization prioritizes its strategies and actions. Finally, in Step 5 the unit uses teams and traditional innovation and improvement tools to implement the identified strategies and actions. This brings the organization back to the start of the process, to assess progress toward the goals in their plan.

This process is illustrated in the following basic model.



## Integrating Planning, Improvement, and Assessment: A Model



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A more detailed discussion follows of each step in the model and tools that can be used at that step. Citations for each tool are listed in the reference section.

### The Five Steps and Related Tools

#### Step 1: Where are we now?

For those who are updating a plan, or who developed a plan in the past, Step 1 begins with a review of the progress toward goals in the previous plan, and any information regarding reasons for progress being made or not made.

The next task is to identify what is changing and what trends are impacting the organization, both internally and externally. Additionally, there should be clarification of who the organization's stakeholders are – those who have an interest, either directly, because they are receiving the unit's service or product, or indirectly, because they are impacted by the unit's actions – and how well the organization is meeting each stakeholder group's expectations. Finally, the organization needs to identify its strengths, core competencies, and capacity for growth and development.

#### *Data Sources and Tools for this Step*

The first source for information to determine where the unit stands currently is any data collected as part of a **recent assessment** process. Annual **unit performance data**, and any insight provided by information from an **institutional data warehouse** is also useful. **Surveys, interviews, and focus groups** can be used to gather information about stakeholder satisfaction, expectations, and thoughts about trends. Review of the **media** may also provide insight on trends.

#### Step 2: Where should we be in the future?

At this point, the organization needs to look at what it is currently doing and determine what it should be doing more, less, or none of in the future. Also, what should it be doing that it is not doing now? What are stakeholders expecting or looking for? In what direction is the larger organization moving, and how can the unit align with or support that? How can the unit support and further the core mission of the organization? It is in this step that the organization can develop or refine its mission, vision, and goals, if necessary.

### *Data Sources and Tools for this Step*

Information from **surveys, interviews, and focus groups** conducted as part of Step 1 can feed into this step. **Affinity diagrams** can be used to cluster individual expectations and possibilities into specific goal or strategy categories. **Scenario planning** can be used to assess trends and identify possible future scenarios that the plan can prepare for or anticipate.

### **Step 3: How will we know when we get there?**

One of the key components of a dynamic plan is measures to indicate progress. These performance indicators should align with mission, vision, and goals to indicate the rate at which the organization is moving toward its goals. However, the emphasis should be on data that can be gathered with minimal overhead, and as part of normal operations. Measurement should not consume more resources than the data it produces is worth.

### *Data Sources and Tools for this Step*

The unit should first look at the **data it already collects** and see whether, or how, any of this can be used to assess progress. **Benchmarking** may be a useful way to determine what measures similar units use. However, the key here is to benchmark processes and approaches, and not use the data collected as a means of comparing performance with other units. If new data must be collected, **brainstorming** and **multivoting** may be a means of getting group input on all of the possibilities, and then narrowing down the possibilities to the most efficient and effective.

### **Step 4: How far do we have to go?**

Once the unit has determined how to measure performance, has baseline data for current performance, and has performance goals, it can determine how much effort will be required to attain each goal. Not all initiatives can, should, or need to be started at once. In Step 4 the unit can determine with which strategies

or initiatives it wants to start, based on available resources, cost, timing, logical sequence, or some other criteria. Those not selected for immediate action are not forgotten. They are just put aside until progress has been made on the selected set of actions. This list of possible future initiatives should be revisited on a quarterly, semi-annual, or annual basis.

### *Data Sources and Tools for this Step*

A **radar chart** may help determine which issues drive others in the organization, and thus where actions should begin and what will produce the greatest return. A **gap analysis** will provide information on the resources and actions needed to get from the current situation to the desired future state. A **prioritization matrix** provides a means to evaluate alternative actions in terms of predetermined criteria.

### **Step 5: How do we get there?**

The final step in the model involves actual implementation of initiatives. Without implementation of initiatives to produce changes, the plan is just another plan sitting on the shelf. At this step it is necessary to identify who will be involved in implementing each initiative, and what resources they will need.

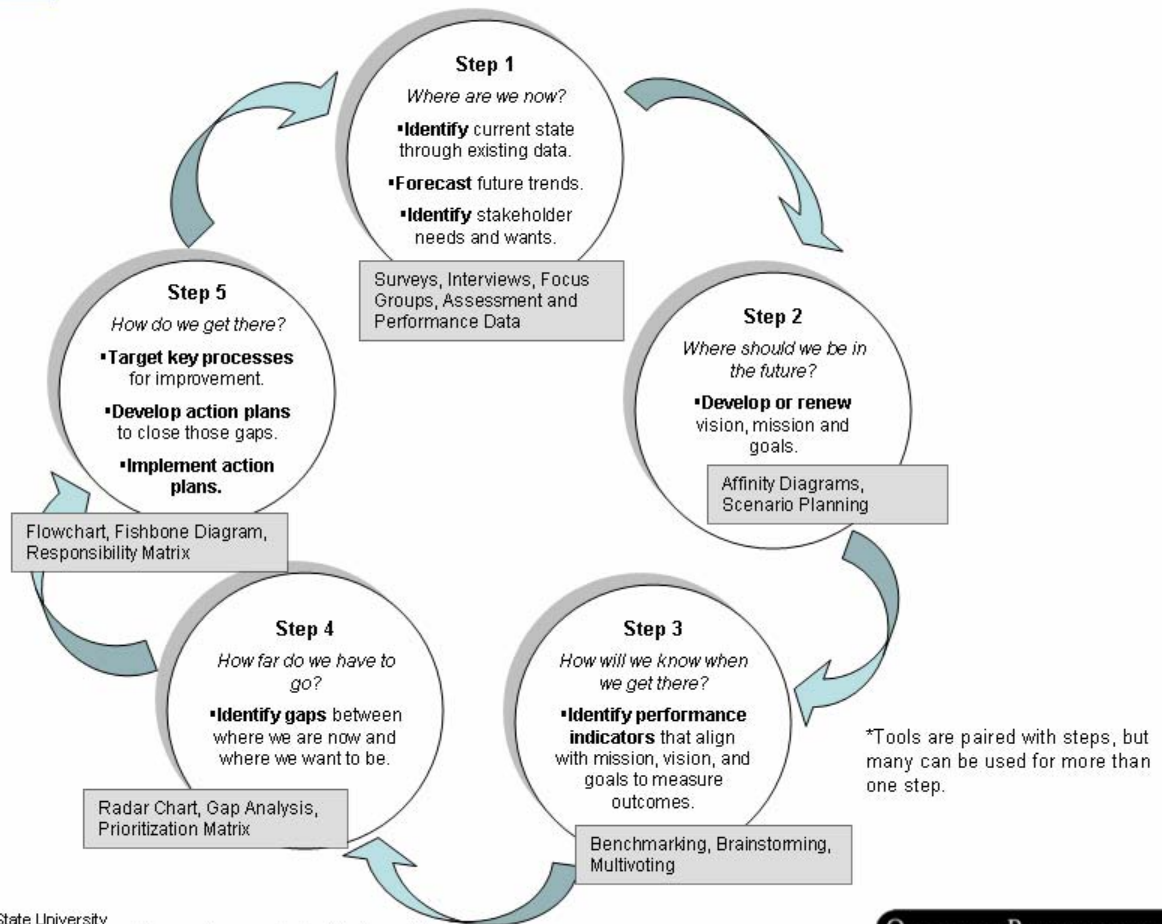
### *Data Sources and Tools for this Step*

Many of the tools used in traditional improvement teams apply here. First, having a **team** address the initiative will increase the likelihood of support for the change by those in the unit. It will also ensure a wider perspective in determining how to implement the initiative. In improving or reengineering an already existing process, **process mapping** or **flowcharting** will identify the current process and help identify functions that must be retained, even if the way the function is done changes. A **fishbone** or **Ishikawa diagram** will help identify problem areas in the current process. Finally, a **responsibility matrix** or **planning grid** will document what actions are needed to implement the initiative, and who will do what when.

The more detailed model, with tools that may be used at each step, is shown below.



## Integrating Planning, Improvement, and Assessment: A Model and Tools\*



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### Next Steps

Once the organization develops a plan and begins implementation, monitoring of progress should occur on a regular, scheduled basis, be it quarterly, semi-annually, or annually. As implementation of the highest priority initiatives is completed, the list of remaining initiatives can be updated and reprioritized, based on the evolving environment, and the new top priority initiatives implemented. At some point, it will be appropriate not just to reprioritize initiatives, but to formally reassess the current situation and coming trends, beginning the cycle again.

### Your Unit's Integration of Planning, Assessment, and Improvement Activities

The brief survey on the following pages will provide a snapshot of where your unit is in integrating its planning, assessment, and improvement activities. You may want to think of this as another assessment tool in your unit's toolkit – something that will provide you with information about how to refine and enhance your current planning, assessment, and improvement activities. For areas where you answer 'Yes', maintain and improve current activities. For areas where you are 'Not Sure', check to find out what information

is available and what you need to close the gaps. For areas where you are sure your answer is 'No', what should be your first steps to address that issue? With these answers, you will be in a position to begin a more informed planning, assessment, and improvement process.

## References and Resources

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## Where Is Your Unit in Integrating Planning, Assessment, and Improvement?

Your response to this profile will give you a quick snapshot of where your work unit is in the process of integrating planning, assessment, and improvement initiatives. Each section of the profile relates to one of the steps in Penn State's five-step model for integrating planning, assessment, and improvement. For each question, indicate whether you can or cannot answer the question, or are not sure. You don't need to actually provide a detailed answer to each question to complete the survey.

	Yes	No	Not Sure
<b>Step #1: Where are you now?</b> Do you know...			
If you have achieved the goals you set in the last planning cycle?			
If there are goals you haven't achieved, and what the reasons are?			
What changes have occurred in your unit since you implemented your last plan? In the University? In your discipline/profession?			
What social, economic, political trends are impacting your unit... .....to your advantage? .....to your disadvantage?			
Who your current stakeholders are? What their expectations are for the services you provide? If there have been changes in their expectations?			
How well you are meeting their expectations?			
What your current capacity is for growth/development?			
What your core competencies are? What you do well?			
Who your external partners are? Who your competitors are? How well you and they are doing?			
<b>Step #2: Where should you be in the future?</b> Do you know...			
What your unit would look like in x years if you were best in the delivery of...?			
How you are adding value in support of the University's core mission?			
What your stakeholders will be expecting from you and how you will be meeting those expectations?			
What core values you have preserved?			
What you will be doing differently? More of? Less of?			

	Yes	No	Not Sure
<b>Step #3: How will you know when you get there?</b> Do you know...			
What you are currently measuring? What the data tell you about how you are currently performing?			
What great performance would look like? Who your benchmarks are?			
How your measures map to your goals and to your stakeholders' expectations?			
If there are measures you should add/measures you should delete?			
<b>Step #4: How far do you have to go?</b> Do you know...			
What the gaps are between where you are now and where you want to be?			
What your approach is for closing these gaps?			
What the implications are for enrollment planning, staffing patterns, space, facilities and information technology requirements?			
What budgetary and other resources you will need to close the gap?			
<b>Step #5: How do you get there?</b> Do you know...			
What is strategically important to improve, based on your aim for the future, your stakeholder knowledge, and the internal and external environment?			
What the significant few processes are that should be targeted for improvement that will give you the greatest leverage?			
How you currently measure process performance?			
What additional information you need to determine how the process is performing to meet stakeholder expectations?			
Who the process owners are?			
Who should be involved in the redesign?			
What your implementation strategy is?			