



The NCJA Podcast Episode 03: Key Elements for Creating an Effective Byrne JAG Strategic Plan with Allison Badger

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Welcome to The NCJA Podcast. This podcast series explores promising practices, provides guidance on strategic planning, and discusses how the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program or Byrne JAG contributes to improving justice systems across the country. We hope you enjoy it.

Gillian Caplan:

Thank you so much for joining us on our NCJA Podcast. My name is Gillian Caplan, and I am the program manager here at NCJA. Today, we're going to be discussing tips for successful strategic planning. This can be applied more specifically to things like Byrne JAG funding, but also more broadly to agency strategic planning in general. I'm really excited because today I'm joined by Allison Badger, the program director at NCJA overseeing statewide planning, TTA for Byrne JAG SAAs.

Thank you, Allison, so much for joining us. I would love if you could give a little introduction about yourself and then we'll dive right into the questions.

Allison Badger:

Thanks, Gillian. I'm happy to be here. I have been with NCJA for a little over a year and a half, and I have about 15 years of experience in the criminal justice space at various levels of local and state government.

Gillian Caplan:

Well, we're really excited to talk about strategic planning today. To kick us off, why don't we discuss why it's important to have a strategic plan?

Allison Badger:

The exercise of developing a strategic plan helps an agency to make better and more informed funding decisions. It adds evidence and thought behind why Byrne JAG dollars and other funding sources are being spent in particular ways. Strategic planning helps agency leadership determine the most critical needs. Additionally, it identifies stakeholders and community partners who can be most effective in implementing programs and what data you have available to best develop and inform your programs and policies.

Lastly, just of note, the Justice for All Reauthorization Act requires all applicants for Byrne JAG state formula grant awards to include a statewide strategic plan that addresses resource allocation, the use of data, and implementation of best practices. The final strategic plan is a roadmap to spending responsibly, but the actual exercise of strategic planning helps an agency ask the right questions to set them up for success.

Gillian Caplan:

Great. The most important thing is to have a successful strategic plan because that helps with implementing all the way down the road. When we're talking about a strategic plan, I know a lot of the people listening to this know what a strategic plan is, but maybe don't know what the essential components are. Could you walk us through what those essential components are?

Allison Badger:

Absolutely. Strategic planning looks different depending on the desired outcomes, but there are some critical fundamental components to make an agency's strategic plan comprehensive and address the needs of the community. An agency has to identify the problem they want to address through identifying priorities. This seems obvious, but it can really be easy to focus on issues that do not address the real needs. Strategic planning creates the structure and steps to ensure that the priorities being addressed are actually the right ones.

These priorities are the main component and driver of your strategic plan, but they will likely not be identified until later in your planning process. And this is because identifying these priorities can't be done alone, and it should include a wide variety of stakeholders and the use of data.

Gillian Caplan:

We know that stakeholders are arguably one of the most important parts of this work and one of the most critical components of strategic planning. Can you give some examples of how to engage your stakeholders when you're doing a strategic planning process?

Allison Badger:

Absolutely. And that's so true, Gillian. A great way to start is with a stakeholder survey and make sure you're including community members and other non-traditional voices such as behavioral health partners or those with lived experience in the criminal justice system. A survey is an especially great option during times of the virtual platforms. An agency can also host focus groups, listening sessions, or town halls to solicit input.

These options make it easy for stakeholders to participate and are a great way to reach a large audience and gauge the priorities of those who will be directly impacted. Lastly, I'll add, after determining the broader areas to focus on through the surveys and focus groups, planning boards can help drill down on where the funding would help most. The planning board should be engaged throughout the entire strategic planning process with consistent and open communication.

This planning board should also include a wide variety of stakeholders. Having a diverse stakeholder engagement process only improves your overall plan.

Gillian Caplan:

Right. I mean, who knows better about what the problems are in a community than community members? And there are different problems in communities that we're looking at. It's important, as you said, to make sure we have a diverse group of voices that are speaking to these issues. We also though know that data-driven decision-making processes are a key to successful strategic plans, arguably as important as stakeholder engagement. Can you talk a little bit about the use of data in strategic planning?

Allison Badger:

Absolutely. Stakeholders help agencies narrow the focus of the problem, and data helps validate these concerns. Information from the stakeholder engagement is one part of the data, but criminal justice data should be the main driver of identifying the problem and helping to define goals. Data is critical to ensuring that what the stakeholders identify as needs are actually the needs. Using data also helps to guarantee information sharing between agencies, which is really critical.

Gillian Caplan:

I know there's a quote that says, "Without data, you're just another person with an opinion," and I think that that is pretty on point for this conversation. And it really seems to be a piece of the criminal justice puzzle. Now that we have mapped out how to identify the problem statement, can you talk about the next key element in the strategic planning process?

Allison Badger:

Yeah, absolutely. You now have your data, your stakeholders supporting your identified priorities. The strategic planning process now moves into defining goals. When you're defining goals, you want to use SMART goals. A SMART goal incorporates all of the following: specificity, measurability, achievability, relevance, and timeliness. This format for goal setting is essential to understanding if what you have outlined in your strategic plan will be successful.

Once you have your priorities and goals identified and always supported with data, you want to map out how you're going to actually accomplish these goals.

Gillian Caplan:

I think it could be helpful if we got an example of what that looked like. Could you take a program and walk us through that?

Allison Badger:

So let's say that data suggests a large increase in individuals with mental illness in jails and prisons in your state. Through your planning process, you and your included stakeholders have identified a priority for funding mental health interventions. So then in your planning process, you've decided to set a SMART goal of let's say reducing the number of individuals in your jail and prisons with mental illness by 10% within five years. So that's really a great goal. So now what?

This is where you look to evidence-based programs and promising practices to determine what programs you want to implement to help you achieve your goals. For this example, that could include core responder models, treatment services and facilities, or mental health courts, as these are all best practices and they can support reducing the number of people in jail and prison with mental illness. In other words, let's look at the strategic planning process like you're about to go on a trip.

You need to figure out where you're going, how you're going to get there, why you should go there, and what steps you need to take in order to get there, like packing, getting gas, or buying a plane ticket. That last part, that is where the action plan comes in. Bringing it back to criminal justice, in order to implement these programs you have identified to address the goals you have outlined, you're going to want to develop an action plan.

This action plan should define the steps for allocating resources among the priorities and should describe the used by the state to incorporate evidence-based practices. Developing this action plan will provide a roadmap for implementing the solutions to the identified problem areas. A plan within the plan, that's really how you know you're organized.

Gillian Caplan:

We have our SMART goals. We have our action plan, and it sounds like we're getting pretty close to finalizing those key elements and having our strategic plan rounded out. What do we have in the final stages of strategic planning?

Allison Badger:

Absolutely. We are so close. The planning board then has to determine an evaluation strategy for the strategic plan. The ultimate goal is to use the SMART goals that you identified to determine if the agency was successful. And additionally, you'll want to proactively identify how the state will assess changing circumstances, if any. This will serve as the basis on which the strategic plan is annually reviewed and the annual report, which is a required component of the Byrne JAG recipients, is planned.

Gillian Caplan:

We have developed the strategic plan. We've seen it all the way through and hopefully implementation will be successful. Now, thinking about how SAAs can come to NCJA for guidance and assistance more broadly, but specifically when it comes to developing their strategic plan, what areas can NCJA help SAAs with?

Allison Badger:

As the long standing provider of strategic planning training and technical assistance to SAAs, NCJA is able to immediately support your agency in the development of strategic plans. We provide subject matter expertise in areas of program implementation and can help build capacity in your strategic planning process. We can assist with your entire process through how you use data to how you incorporate evidence-based practices. NCJA is available for both a light touch and an intensive technical assistance.

If your agency would like to enhance stakeholder engagement or develop a more comprehensive planning board, NCJA can provide and analyze a stakeholder survey, as well as host and facilitate focus groups. If your agency needs assistance in navigating the strategic planning process, including the facilitation of strategic planning working sessions, we'd be happy to walk you through all the BJ requirements, as well as host the working session, actively providing input along the way.

We're also available to review your strategic plans through the process and provide overall feedback once it's finalized to make sure that it has all the necessary components. For those states who are considering new programs funded with Byrne JAG and may want connections with subject matter expertise to properly develop and implement, NCJA can help with that as well.

We have staff with experiences ranging from public safety to behavioral health, to pretrial diversion, as well as the areas of performance measures and local community planning. We also have access to a host of field experts in a variety of criminal justice topic areas.



Gillian Caplan:

Wow, not too broad, but it sounds like NCJA has a lot of ways that we can really help the SAAs and their strategic planning process. How then if an SAA is interested in receiving assistance through working with NCJA, how do they begin to engage NCJA through the TTA process?

Allison Badger:

We definitely are here to help in any way we can, Gillian. NCJA is readily available to assist your agency in any way you need. Feel free to email us at strategicplanning@ncja.org, or go to our website, ncja.org. And under the strategic planning TTA tab, you can fill out a form there and we will reach out to you as soon as possible. Really you can reach us any way and we are happy to help.

Gillian Caplan:

Thank you so much for joining me today on this podcast. I think we learned a lot about strategic planning, areas that make us more successful when we're implementing, why stakeholder engagement is important, why data is important, and how to really develop SMART goals into action plans. Allison, thank you so much for joining me today, and thank you all for listening.

Allison Badger:

Thank you. Happy to be here.

Audio:

Thanks again to Gillian Caplan and Allison Badger from NCJA for giving us an overview of the strategic planning process and why it's so important. Any resources mentioned, including this podcast, can be found at www.ncja.org. If you want to inquire about technical assistance with strategic planning or other assistance regarding Byrne JAG awards, email us at strategicplanning@ncja.org. Thank you.