

Creating a Comprehensive Strategic Plan

A Guide for Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Strategic Planning

The Justice for All Reauthorization Act (JFAA) was signed into law in December of 2016 and requires all applicants for the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) state formula award to submit a statewide strategic plan that addresses planned resource allocation, use of data and implementation of evidence-informed practices.

A strategic plan is a document used to communicate goals, actions needed to achieve those goals and all other critical elements developed during the planning process. The content and length of the final strategic plan may vary, but at a minimum, the plan must:

- Be updated every five years
- Be developed in consultation with a diverse group of stakeholders
- Include details of how the funds will be used to improve the administration of the criminal justice system
- Include a description of how the state will allocate funding within and among each of the [nine Byrne JAG program areas](#)
- Describe the process used by the state for gathering data and developing and using evidence-informed and evidence-gathering approaches in support of funding decisions
- Describe the barriers at the state and local levels for accessing data and implementing evidence-informed approaches to preventing and reducing crime and recidivism

A comprehensive strategic plan should answer four main questions:

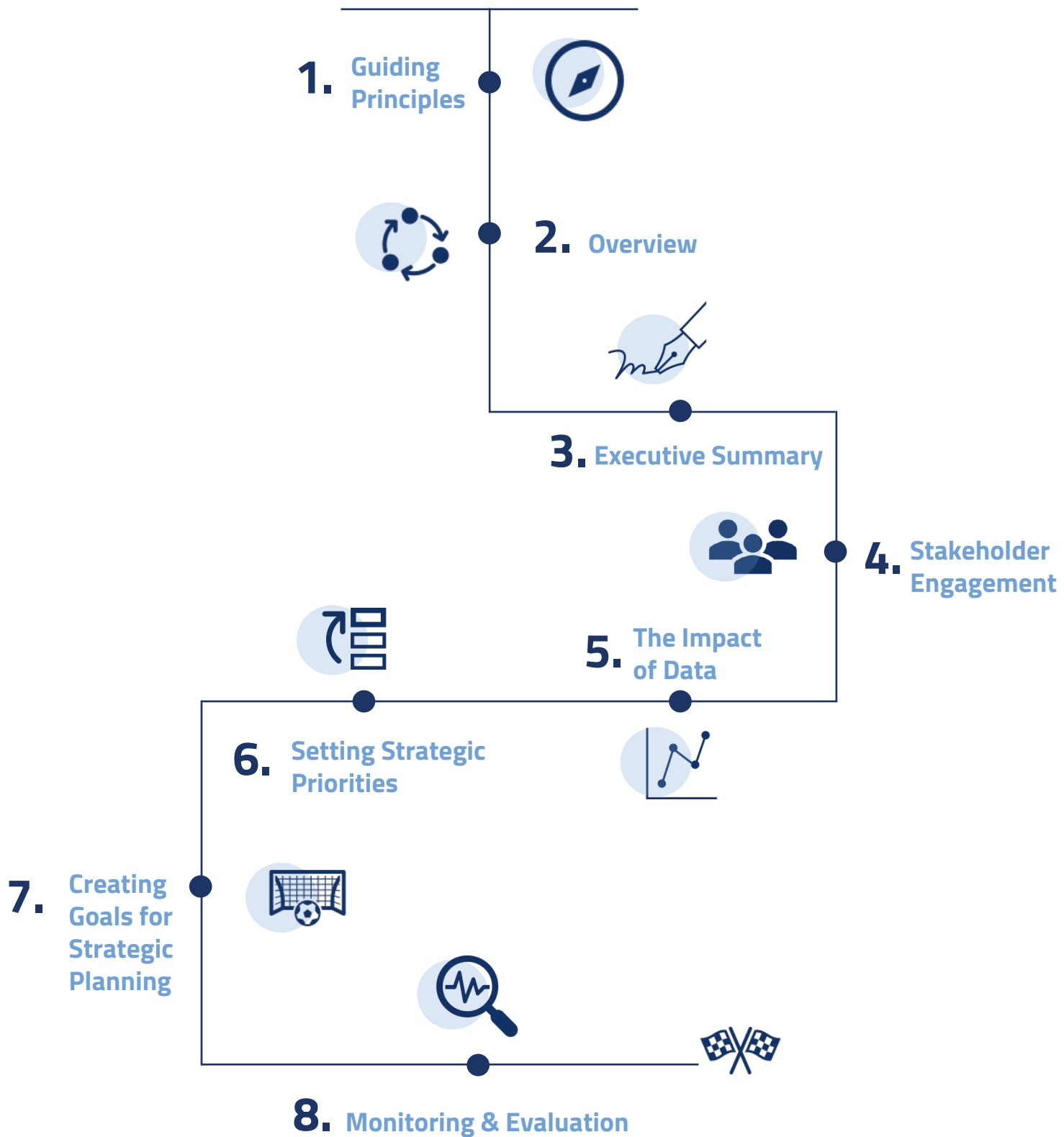
1 Where are we now?

3 What specific policies, practices, programs or other activities should we implement to get us there?

2 Where do we want to go?

4 Are we following our designated road map and achieving our expected results?

Essential Components of a Strategic Plan



The four key questions on page one lay the framework for highlighting the state’s goals and priorities and telling the story of how those goals and priorities were determined. Each state has a unique set of resources and needs and while there are many strategic planning models, no single model or process is the perfect fit for every situation or every state. Below is recommended guidance for the development of a statewide strategic plan; it is meant only as a guide and can be adapted as needed.

Component 1: Guiding Principles

Developing strategic planning guiding principles can be an important starting point for the strategic planning process. These principles set the stage for the process and serve as the driving force behind the plan. Establishing these on paper keeps your process grounded in agreed-upon principles and helps to maintain some scope control. An agency is encouraged to create its own guiding principles for the strategic planning process, but these may include:

- Align with the mission and vision of the agency.
- Be intentional about including many diverse stakeholders (both traditional and nontraditional).
- Tailor engagement strategies to the needs of each stakeholder.
- Remain flexible when possible.
- Allow space for new and innovative approaches.
- Remain data-driven.
- Remember that strategic planning is a dynamic process.
- Ground the strategic planning process in equity.

Component 2: Overview

The overview section of a strategic plan provides an opportunity to highlight the agency’s history, mission and vision as well as describe the purpose for the creation of the strategic plan. The purpose of the plan should include whether this is a statewide criminal justice strategic plan or a plan specific to Byrne JAG. This should be a high-level description about the planning process leading to the development of an engaged, data-informed strategic plan that will support evidence-informed investments based on the needs of the state and its stakeholders.



Component 3: Executive Summary

An executive summary can set the tone for a strategic plan. It highlights the main components of the strategic plan and its process and summarizes the full plan in a few paragraphs, including identified priorities. The executive summary is often the last completed section of the plan, as it is easier to summarize after all necessary components of the plan have been finalized.

Component 4: Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is an integral part of the strategic planning process. As outlined in the Byrne JAG solicitation, certain stakeholders must be included. These stakeholders include local government and representatives from all sectors including judges, prosecutors, law enforcement, corrections, indigent defense, victim services, juvenile justice delinquency prevention programs, community corrections and reentry services. In addition to the stakeholders outlined in the Byrne JAG solicitation, NCJA highly recommends that states include other nontraditional stakeholders. These can include representatives from behavioral health, public health, universities/research partners, community non-profits, faith leaders, state court administrators, community members and those with lived experiences (individuals directly impacted by the issues the strategic plan is looking to address). The process should aim to engage a diverse set of stakeholders that is representative of the state as a whole and its criminal justice system.

There are many methods to use to engage stakeholders. The strategic plan should outline what methods were used, as well as the results from the engagement. The following section outlines the information to consider including in the stakeholder engagement section of a strategic plan.

Byrne JAG Advisory Board

Board Creation:

What is the board's history and authorizing legislation (executive order or rule promulgation, etc.)?

Board Composition:

Who are the members of the board and how are they selected (appointed, through an application process, required by state statute, etc.)? What are the board members' respective areas of expertise?

Types of Engagement:

How are board members engaged? Does the board hold meetings? How often? What do meetings entail? What are the results of board engagement and how did this engagement inform the strategic planning process?

Board Responsibilities:

What is the role of the board? Does the board play a passive or active role in strategic plan development? Does the board advise on or determine goals and priorities? Is the board responsible for scoring and reviewing grant proposals and authorizing funding decisions?



Stakeholder Surveys

Stakeholder engagement surveys are a common method used by states to inform the priorities of the strategic plan. These surveys can help increase understanding about the knowledge and perspectives of stakeholders. If a stakeholder survey was used to gather feedback for the strategic plan and its priorities, consider adding the following information to the plan:

- What types of questions were asked?
- Who received the survey? What stakeholder groups were included or had a low response rate?
- How long was the survey open? Include both the month and year.
- Did you encounter any barriers? These might include low response rates, overrepresentation from certain sectors and/or limited analysis capabilities.
- What were the results of the stakeholder survey?
- Highlight how the survey results directly inform the priorities of the plan.
- Consider including charts and graphs to depict survey results.

Focus Groups or Town Halls

Focus groups and town halls can be great ways to gather feedback from stakeholders. They provide direct engagement with stakeholders and can provide qualitative information that can help inform a strategic plan. Town halls in particular can be helpful when soliciting community member feedback. If you determine through your stakeholder survey that a particular group of individuals had a low response rate, or if anyone was missing, consider doing a targeted focus group to gather qualitative data from those groups to fill any gaps. If focus groups or town halls were used to gather feedback, consider adding the following information to the plan:

- Who was included in the focus groups? How were participants identified and invited to participate?
- When were focus groups conducted? How many focus groups were conducted? How long were the focus groups? Who was the facilitator? What types of questions were asked?
- When were the town halls conducted? How many were conducted? What information was shared with participants? Was there open dialogue?
- Were there any barriers encountered during the focus groups or town halls? Barriers could include things such as low participation or low turnout.

Other Stakeholder Engagement Activities

- Are there other stakeholder engagement activities that informed the plan?
- Were criminal justice coordinating councils (CJCCs), other types of councils or advisory boards and/or justice-focused planning bodies for other state formula grants engaged?

Component 5: The Impact of Data

Data is an important aspect of the strategic planning process. While stakeholder input helps identify needs, data helps to validate these as objectively supported needs. Regular data collection and analysis help to detect trends or rapid changes that might indicate a problem that needs to be prioritized. The data included in the strategic plan should be directly related to the priorities outlined.

Avoid including “data for data’s sake.” The data included in the plan should be relevant, timely and accurate and inform the priorities and goals of the plan. The strategic plan should describe the process used by the state to determine which data to use and the process of gathering and analyzing that data. Data can be difficult to access and analyze at both the state and local levels, so if there are barriers encountered when accessing data, describe those in the plan.

The data points to include in a strategic plan vary from state to state but may include the following:

- Crime statistics
- Corrections data
- Court data, which could include prosecution/defense data such as charges and sentences
- State demographic information
- Drug seizures
- Arrest rates
- Behavioral health data such as fatal and non-fatal overdoses and treatment statistics
- Data on unhoused individuals
- Disparities within the justice system broken out by demographic group



Include explanations of any graphs or numbers and be sure to note any potential caveats with the accuracy or completeness of the data referenced in the plan. A short summary at the end of the data section of your plan can be helpful to tie the data explicitly back to the potentially outlined priorities or trends described in the stakeholder engagement process.

Historical Funding and Programming



If previously funded programs or investments have been identified to continue to receive funding from the state, it can be helpful to include a brief section detailing those historical investments. This might include a summary of the programs, a description of the data collected from the programs and a clear connection back to the current priorities. Include any data that explicitly demonstrates the success of the previously funded projects.

Component 6: Setting Strategic Priorities

The priorities in the strategic plan should detail how funding will be used to improve the administration of the criminal justice system. The stakeholder input and data referenced throughout the plan should inform the plan's strategic priorities. Strategic planning activities and engagement (surveys, focus groups and data collection and analysis) likely uncovered priorities and problems for the state to address. Consider sharing the themes identified and definitively summarize priorities.

- What priorities were identified by each component of the strategic planning process? Were there any patterns? Which priorities were identified as most appropriate for JAG funding as opposed to other federal, state or local funding sources?
- Which Byrne JAG program areas will be prioritized in the plan and how will resources be allocated within each program area?
- How will the state support evidence-informed programming and evidence-gathering approaches? How does the state's grantmaking processes identify, solicit and support evidence-informed programming? Are there any barriers for implementing evidence-informed approaches?
- Are there ways in which the state prioritizes investing in evidence-informed programming? Build in flexibility regarding the use of evidence so as to not penalize smaller organizations who may not yet have the resources for monitoring and evaluation. Consider funding training and technical assistance to build capacity for organizations to complete evaluations.
- Based on the priorities identified throughout the entire process, how were the final strategic priorities determined and narrowed down? Who was involved in determining the final priorities?

Example Strategic Priority



Preventing and Reducing Gun Violence

Data analysis highlighted a stark increase in gun violence in the state between 2019 and 2022. Additionally, stakeholder engagement identified preventing gun violence as a top priority area for the state to address. Funding will be used to support evidence-informed violent crime prevention and reduction through:

- Identifying and implementing strategies to prevent suicide deaths
- Identifying and implementing community violence intervention strategies in areas with highest violent crime rates

Component 7: Creating Goals for Strategic Planning

Outlining goals is one of the most important elements of a strategic plan. Goals provide details about how the state plans to address the identified priorities and provides a method of determining whether adequate progress is occurring toward addressing the state’s most pressing needs and challenges. When determining goals for the strategic plan, it is important to ensure all goals are S.M.A.R.T.

Specific

What will the goal accomplish? What is the time-frame? How and why will it be accomplished? Who will need to be involved to achieve this goal? Who will be responsible for accomplishing this goal?

Measurable

How will success be measured? What is the starting point? Avoid using percentages unless you establish the baseline. First, set the baseline before including a goal to reduce violent crime by 10 percent, for example.

S.

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Attainable

Are the knowledge, skills, abilities and resources to accomplish the goal available? Is there a need to leverage additional funding?

Relevant

What is the reason, purpose or benefit of accomplishing the goal? Is the goal in line with the larger agency mission?

Time-Bound

What is the established completion date and does that completion date create a practical sense of urgency?

Identify what success looks like based on the priorities and goals outlined. If the goal is being measured for the first time, it can be helpful to include a range of success. Where relevant, include at least one S.M.A.R.T. goal for each priority identified. Include any barriers to measuring and evaluating progress toward the S.M.A.R.T goals.

Example S.M.A.R.T. Goal



Reduce and prevent gun violence in the state through increasing the number of available suicide prevention services by 10 percent of the baseline number within three years.



Note that the example goal above ties directly back to the identified priority on page six.

Component 8: Evaluation and Monitoring

A strategic plan is a living document that should be updated and reviewed frequently. Per JFAA requirements, the strategic plan must be updated in full at least every five years, although many states elect to update the plan more frequently. In each year in which the plan is not fully updated, an [annual report](#) must be submitted. States should include a section in their strategic plan for evaluating, reviewing and updating the plan. Points to consider including in this section of the strategic plan can include the following:

- Describe how often the plan will be reviewed and updated.
- Explain the anticipated process for updating the strategic plan.
- Identify how the plan will be monitored for success.
- Describe how data will be used to evaluate the plan, including all outcomes associated with the S.M.A.R.T. goals.

Including a section on how the plan will be analyzed and updated, and reassessed as needed, is crucial in terms of determining the overall success of the strategic plan, but also in terms of writing the annual report. The annual report requests information about changing circumstances, progress toward goals and any new or continuing barriers. In order to write the annual report each year, a course of action must be in place for how the state aims to review the entire strategic plan, assess progress and adjust direction as needed.

About NCJA's Training and Technical Assistance

NCJA offers direct strategic planning technical assistance to state and local criminal justice agencies. Assistance can take the form of stakeholder engagement advisement, data analysis, review of strategic plans and more! To request direct assistance or ask the NCJA Center for Justice Planning team questions, please reach out to us at strategicplanning@ncja.org.

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