Why Craft a Strategic Plan?
A strategic plan is a road map for accomplishing a goal in an effective and timely manner. Strategic planning is a continuous analytic process used to (1) create a focus for activities and resources to achieve specific results, and (2) develop shared responsibility for achieving those results. The process provides a systematic way for an organization or system to express its vision, describe its values, state or update its mission, identify strengths and weaknesses, and develop and accomplish short- and long-term goals.

While there are many strategic planning models, and no single model or process is the perfect fit for every situation, effective strategic planning processes are designed to address the following questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- What specific policies, practices, programs or other activities will be implemented to get us there?
- Are we following our designated road map and achieving our expected results?

One of the core features of an effective strategic planning process is its ongoing and cyclical nature. A sound strategic plan is dynamic rather than static; it incorporates ongoing learning and continuous quality improvement. For example, sustainable strategic planning requires: (1) monitoring progress in achieving expected results, (2) an assessment of problems, needs, internal and external conditions, and (3) ensuring effective solutions on a routine and ongoing basis. Knowledge of implementation progress and problems, and new or emerging conditions, informs the planning process and maximizes effectiveness.

How to Incorporate Data into Planning
An effective strategic planning process uses data and analysis in several important ways. Research, statistical analysis, and other background materials are relied upon to help define the current environment from an objective standpoint and to better understand and prioritize problems and needs (i.e. crime problems, system inefficiencies, gaps in services, targets for reforms, etc.).

Data is also important for monitoring progress in implementing the plan, and to document how well the plan mitigates identified problems and needs. Monitoring implementation in a systematic, data-driven fashion is critical—as deviations from the plan are likely to occur. Identifying problems before they become intractable, so that corrective action can be taken, is the key to maximizing success.

In order to determine the effects of constituent programs and the overall impact of the plan, outcome evaluation is equally important. Evaluation conducted during and after the development of programs should be a core feature of the plan, and investments to build evaluation capacity should be made when existing capabilities are insufficient for the plan's assessment needs.
Interagency Involvement and Engaging Stakeholders

At the state level, effective strategic planning means that state agencies work with one another across traditional boundaries to foster meaningful relationships at the state level, and with stakeholders at the local level. Comprehensive strategic plans must provide a policy and programming blueprint not only for multiple state and local criminal justice agencies, but for other organizations outside of the justice system that nonetheless provide services to criminal justice system involved clients. Strategic planning initiatives require inclusion of stakeholders early in the process.

The stakeholders should include widespread representation in order to build support and commitment to the effort. It also creates connections among diverse groups that might not otherwise interact, thereby increasing the probability the plan will produce desired results.

Leadership

Involvement of high ranking officials is critical. Strategic plans should be developed by individuals with the authority and responsibility to carry out the plan and achieve its intended results.

Effective leadership is another important component of an effective strategic planning process. Effective leaders cultivate a collaborative and inclusive culture, establish ground rules, hold stakeholders accountable for their roles and responsibilities, and value and effectively use data, performance metrics, and other information.2

Capacity Building

Capacity building facilitates successful implementation of the strategic plan and institutionalizes system improvements—even when other external forces (e.g. available resources and political climates) change. Building lasting capacity in areas such as data development, information sharing, evidence-based programming, evaluation, and interdisciplinary collaboration provides a host of benefits, many of which can transcend the planning process through long-term institutionalization.

The Role of the Governor and their Criminal Justice Policy Advisor

As the state’s chief executive, governors play a critical role in ensuring public safety. Governors set the public safety priorities for their administration and oversee the state agencies responsible for implementing those policies and programs. To help them define and achieve their priorities, governors rely on criminal justice policy advisors (CJPA) as a primary source of information and their integral role in forming state criminal justice policy. CJPA should work with the Director of the State’s Administering Agency to develop a policy agenda and assess the public safety agencies that are best aligned to achieve the administration’s goals.

The Role of the State Administering Agencies

State Administering Agencies (SAAs) have been a locus of statewide criminal justice strategic planning since the mid-1980s under the federal Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) and its predecessor block grant programs.3 For more than 30 years, SAAs have been engaged in coordinated and transparent strategic planning to analyze crime trends, evaluate the priorities of all segments of the criminal justice system, set out a plan for reducing crime and victimization, and guide the use of the grant funds that guides the implementation of structural reforms.4

The most effective strategic planning processes within SAAs have been based upon input from a core planning team that consists of the SAA director, executive staff, and a wide range of stakeholders representing all components of the criminal
justice system, the behavioral health system, and other important constituency groups. These include: municipal, county, and state level law enforcement, including jail administrators; prosecution; public defense; the judiciary, including court clerks; community corrections, including pretrial services, probation and parole; the state prison system; reentry; state- and local-level substance abuse and mental health agencies; the faith community; victim advocates; and members of the public. Geographic diversity is important so that both urban and rural perspectives and issues are represented.

The Role of the State Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs)\(^5\)

SACs frequently have played a role in supporting the planning process carried out by SAAs through the provision of data and analysis, the translation of scientific research findings for application in policy and practice, and the assessment of strategy and program results. Many SACs are located within an SAA, so their relationships with SAAs coupled with their expertise makes them valuable assets at virtually every stage of the planning process, from needs assessment through evaluation.

**Conclusion**

A strategic plan is an important tool that should be used to guide efforts with the intent of accomplishing a specific goal in an effective and timely manner. When informed by data and designed to build capacity in the justice system through collaboration, a strategic plan will maximize impact and ensure long-term sustainability.

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1 Adapted from the National Criminal Justice Association, National Criminal Justice Planning Center. http://www.ncjp.org/strategic-planning.
3 The Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program (Byrne JAG) is the nation’s cornerstone crime-fighting program, supporting the federal government’s role in spurring innovation, as well as testing and replicating evidence-based practices in crime control and prevention nationwide.
4 The leadership and staff of state administering agencies (SAAs) are as varied in their makeup and talent mix as the size, shape, weather, geography, and demographics of the states and territories where they are located. Each SAA has unique local legislative requirements, local expectations, and ways of doing business.
5 Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs) perform a variety of activities including collecting, analyzing, and distributing criminal justice data, conducting policy-relevant research, and designing and implementing automated information systems. Supported in part by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, SACs play an important role in development of criminal and juvenile justice policy at the state and local levels. Their research provides evidence that policymakers can use to guide their decision-making. By furthering the use of evidence-based practices in their states’, SACs promote the effective and efficient administration of criminal and juvenile justice.

There are currently SACs in 51 states and territories. http://www.jrsa.org/sac/.