

Action Planning

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- ◆ **Identify resources needed and make cost projections.** How much funding is needed to implement a specific intervention? Identify the kinds of resources needed, estimate costs, make projections, and develop a resource plan.
- ◆ **Plan to acquire or reallocate resources.** How will funding be acquired? Identify resource providers, and be prepared for making adjustments to the resource plan.
- ◆ **Specify dates by which implementation tasks will be accomplished,** and assign responsibilities to staff members for carrying out tasks. A timeline or Gantt chart is particularly useful for this purpose.
- ◆ **Develop mechanisms of self-regulation.** Create mechanisms to monitor staff performance and enhance communication, including procedures for orienting participants, coordinating activities, and managing resistance and conflict.
- ◆ **Specify a plan to build and maintain support.** Anticipate sources of resistance and develop responses.

Action planning is Stage 4 of the seven-stage model used in this book. We assume that the first three stages of analysis have been completed at this point in time: Stage 1 (analyzing the problem), Stage 2 (setting goals and objectives), and Stage 3 (designing the program or policy). Recall that the steps involved for developing a *new* program or policy or analyzing an *existing* one are similar (see Introduction). If developing a new program or policy (see Table I.1 in Introduction), you should now have the program or policy design specified, and it is time to develop a plan to put it into motion. If analyzing an existing program or policy (see Table I.2 in Introduction), you want to collect information to determine how critical decisions were

made to implement the program (e.g., how resources were estimated and acquired, how support was built).

Action Planning

Charting the entire sequence of activities and completion dates required to implement the program or policy design. It involves specifying, in clear and concise detail, the steps required to implement the program or policy design. It is, in essence, a blueprint explaining how to translate a vision of the program or policy into reality.

Developing an *action plan* is like writing the instructions explaining how to assemble a new computer system. Let's say you're about to assemble a complex home theater system of electronic equipment by carefully following all the manufacturer's instructions. You have all the necessary components laid out in front of you; you hook up all the wires and cords according to the instructions, and you hook up the power supply. Now it is time to turn on the switch. Then: *Will it run at all? If so, will it run effectively and efficiently? What do you do if it doesn't?* Needless to say, simply having all the components doesn't do much good unless the instructions effectively explain what is needed to get the thing going. One needs a plan for putting the system into operation and making sure that it is working properly.

Here's another analogy: developing an action plan is like the blueprint for building a house. In addition to the *description* of the house (e.g., a four-bedroom, two-story brick house with a deck, modern kitchen, and landscaped yard), you need a *blueprint* that specifies all the necessary materials, supplies, and tools required, what goes where, and how things are supposed to fit together. Without the blueprint, you can't even begin. We find out how good the blueprint is when we actually put it into action step-by-step. Alas, the blueprint didn't just fall out of the sky into our waiting hands. Someone (the architect) put considerable thought and effort into explaining how to translate her vision of a house into reality. In essence, developing an action plan is like writing a blueprint.

Implementation

The initiation, management, and administration of the action plan (see Chapter 5). Once the program or policy actually begins, we want to minimize discrepancies between what was planned (i.e., the program or policy design) and what was actually done (i.e., the program or policy in action).

Programs and policies are similar—we need a blueprint. We may have the program or policy design on paper (i.e., descriptions of target selection procedures, job descriptions and qualifications of staff, and all the program/policy components or services to be delivered), but that is not sufficient. You need to develop an action plan, a blueprint that methodically specifies the sequence of tasks that need to be completed in order to launch or implement the program or policy successfully. These include technical and interpersonal tasks (e.g., identifying and acquiring the necessary resources for the program or policy; locating office space and/or meeting space; hiring and training staff; designing client intake and reporting forms; purchasing equipment and supplies; and setting dates and assigning responsibility for the completion of specific tasks).

Naturally, as with the hypothetical computer system above, you want the program or policy to run properly after you've spent time, money, and energy on it. If you have planned carefully, you can minimize unanticipated problems that can surface when the program or policy actually begins operations.

IDENTIFY RESOURCES NEEDED AND MAKE COST PROJECTIONS

We need to identify all the specific resources necessary to implement an intervention. In real life, this is extremely important. One cannot launch any program or policy without the fiscal and personal resources needed to translate a vision into reality. One needs to start by developing a *resource plan*, which enumerates all the specific costs associated with each program or policy component, including staff salaries, benefits, training, supplies, physical space, and so on.

Resource Plan

A comprehensive statement of the specific fiscal, material, and social resources required to implement an intervention. All program or policy costs are estimated, including personnel, training, equipment, supplies, facilities, travel, and so on.

A resource plan attempts to achieve the following goals:

- It matches resources to objectives. One must carefully ensure that all the resources necessary to achieve the objectives of the program or policy are in place. It forces us to impose a test of feasibility: either resources must rise to the level needed to achieve the stated objectives of the program or policy, or the objectives must be downscaled to match the level of resources available.

- It identifies the availability of current resources and resources still needed to implement the program or policy design properly.
- It attempts to control expenditures, usually by specifying how much money is to be spent over specific periods of time, such as each quarter (a three-month period) or each year.
- It provides data for monitoring fiscal aspects of the program or policy and providing feedback to funding sources and other stakeholders (e.g., annual reports, or quarterly grant reports).

We offer a few simple guidelines for developing the resource plan. We emphasize that one need not be a financial wizard, an economist, or an accountant to understand and use basic principles of resource planning. We will not be discussing professional budgeting models such as incremental models, performance-based budgeting, program budgeting, or zero-based budgeting. The interested reader can find detailed discussions on these specialized techniques elsewhere (Kettner et al., 2013; Mikesell, 2014; Miller et al., 2001). Instead, we present two basic principles of resource planning. First, we identify the kinds of resources needed. Second, we estimate costs for each type of resource needed.

First, list the different categories of resources that are needed to achieve each program or policy objective. Work closely from the program or policy design (see Chapter 3). The resource list should include everything that costs anything. For example:

- Staff: how many, with what qualifications?
- Staff training: what kind, and how much will be needed?
- Supplies: paper, printing and copying, office supplies?
- Advertising: brochures, flyers, public service announcements?
- Equipment: computers, telephones, copiers?
- Rental costs: office space, meeting space, and other specialized space, if required (e.g., private interviewing rooms)?
- Utilities: telephone, electrical, heat, and water bills?

Some types of costs can be anticipated and calculated fairly precisely (e.g., salaries, rent); others may vary a great deal (e.g., telephone, photocopying, supplies). How do you find out? Ask around; do some research on similar programs or policies. Consult directors of other programs and agencies; see if it is possible to

look at funding proposals that other agencies have prepared. Contact potential funding sources (e.g., state or federal government) to see if they will allow you to look at selected proposals they have funded in the past (probably with confidential financial information such as individual salaries removed, but with basic categories of costs such as personnel costs intact). For an example, see Case Study 4.1, which presents a sample grant application to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) DNA Backlog Reduction Program. Many evidence-based program databases also include basic resource estimates for the programs they've reviewed.¹

Those involved with the day-to-day operations of the program or the implementation of the policy (e.g., program or agency staff, coordinators, and directors) should have some input into what fiscal and social resources are needed to run the program or administer the policy. Too often, especially in applications to government agencies for funding, we see resource plans that were developed entirely by professional grant writers outside of the agency. The problem is that those grant writers may have had little or no contact with the daily operations of the program or its clients, and their estimates of resources may not correspond very closely with the experience of the staff or the clients. Again, we emphasize the value of participation: do not exclude the input of staff or clients to aid resource planning.

Next, we ask how much of each kind of resource is needed. It is very important to be realistic about cost estimates. If you estimate too little, the program or policy is likely to fail. If you estimate too much, the proposal may not get funded, or the agency may face accusations of waste. A good budget will not only describe all estimated costs, but will provide a clear justification for each expenditure item.

In general, we attempt to estimate all the costs involved with processing all clients or targets through all phases of the program or policy over a specific period of time (e.g., one year). As we are trying to estimate these costs associated with each program or policy design component, we try to be as thorough as possible. In addition to paying staff salaries, how much will it cost to train staff? How much will it cost to print and duplicate the client intake forms and other record-keeping forms needed? How much will it cost to acquire the supplies needed to deliver specific services (e.g., textbooks, learning aids, computer software, etc.)? How much will it cost to pay electrical, telephone, and water bills for the rooms or offices that are to be used?

Start-up costs are generally higher than costs for subsequent years. This is because we need to purchase new equipment and supplies, and set up management systems, staff recruitment systems, and referral systems. Often the flow of clients into a program is below capacity for the first year, or is unstable for the first couple of years. This creates fiscal instability that needs to be planned for.

Some funding sources are limited to a short period of time: one to three years. These funders often want to know how their funds will be replaced once their

grant ends. They won't want to invest in a program that cannot sustain a flow of needed resources.

Again, we recommend working closely from the program or policy design. Estimate the costs involved for each program or policy design component. For example, conducting DNA analysis on DNA samples collected from all convicted felony and misdemeanor offenders requires highly specialized equipment as well as highly trained staff (see Case Study 4.1). How much staff time will be needed over a specific time period, and how much will the necessary equipment cost? Some will complain that in this era of scarce resources and shrinking budgets, funding agencies expect programs to do more for less, that is, provide comprehensive, intensive services on a shoestring budget. Program directors may complain that they are already committed to providing services far beyond what their meager budgets actually pay for. But how can they possibly provide more services than what their budgets allow for? By overworking and burning out their most motivated staff persons, by pushing untrained staff to provide specialized services (e.g., life skills training, conflict-resolution training), by constantly training and recruiting new staff to replace the ones who left, by working hard to provide the impression (a "front") that the program is really "working," and by actively covering up any negative information that might threaten the program's survival. Such a situation is untenable. A good resource plan would never allow such a fiasco.

PLAN TO ACQUIRE OR REALLOCATE RESOURCES

The task of obtaining funds to implement the program or policy requires a combination of experience, dedication, persistence, and patience. In most cases, the change agent or another specifically appointed individual (e.g., the program director or the agency's executive director) will scour the grant announcements of government, private, and nonprofit agencies, attempting to find some match between the interests of potential funding providers and the type of services the program is designed to provide. The interests of funding providers are usually clearly spelled out in Annual Program Announcements, Grant Announcements, or Requests for Proposals (RFPs). In other cases, the change agent may lobby to get individuals or agencies interested in putting up funding for the program, arguing that it addresses a compelling problem or need within the mission of the funding provider. Consider the following types of funding sources (see Figure 4.1).

Acquiring the necessary resources to implement the program may involve any or all of a combination of activities: writing a formal funding application to a government or nonprofit agency; lobbying local, state, or federal politicians for funding; making informal inquiries, presentations, and solicitations to various agencies; and familiarizing oneself with the entire funding terrain of potential funding sources.

- *Local, state, or federal government agencies:* Does the program or policy address a compelling need or problem that fits within the mission statement and jurisdiction of a government agency? Federal agencies are most likely to have specific grant announcements; local (city or county) agencies are most likely to fund specific programs that address their mission.
- *Governmental funds designated for special purposes:* Find out if city, state, or federal agencies have designated specific funds for certain programming areas (e.g., crime prevention, drug awareness education, violence prevention, etc.). Funding priorities or targeted programming areas change from year to year, so one must stay up to date with each agency's funding priorities.
- *User fees:* In some cases, nominal fees may be charged to the clients, although these fees are usually far less than actual program costs. In many criminal justice programs, such user fees are unpopular, but we have seen more creative user fees in recent years (e.g., a probation agency charges a daily fee to all participants to help offset costs of electronic surveillance; the incentive to pay such fees resides in offenders' motivations to be supervised in the community, rather than prison, to maintain full-time employment, and be closer to their families).
- *Private and nonprofit agencies* (e.g., the MacArthur Foundation, the United Way, the Pugh Foundation): These agencies often provide funding for programs that address their specific mission statements.
- *Donations from businesses:* Many large corporations and even many small community businesses have become increasingly involved in providing support for programs or policies that address community needs. In addition to "giving something back to the community" by being good citizens, many business people may qualify for valuable tax breaks by making donations of equipment, goods, services, or money.
- *Volunteers:* Many programs and agencies make extensive use of volunteers to provide some services (e.g., tutoring and mentoring in after-school delinquency prevention programs). Of course, volunteers need to be qualified and trained to provide specific services, and the program or agency must be prepared to support its volunteers.
- *Fund-raising projects:* Special projects may occasionally be undertaken to raise money for the program's services.

FIGURE 4.1 *Potential Funding Sources*

SPECIFY DATES BY WHICH IMPLEMENTATION TASKS WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED

The next task, probably the most important one at this stage, is to develop a program or policy timeline, sometimes called a *Gantt chart* (see Example 4.1), which specifies three elements: (1) all the specific implementation activities that need to be accomplished, (2) assignment of responsibility for each specific task to one or more individuals, and (3) a specific date by which each task is to be completed. This process may seem tedious, but it is a far more effective alternative than merely "winging it" or improvising program/policy implementation. Without a specific plan that incorporates all three elements listed above, the program or policy is likely to experience difficulty (or even mortality) before it even gets off the ground. A Gantt chart is a blueprint for putting all the program or policy elements into operation: step-by-step instructions explaining how to implement the program.

ACTIVITY	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIME SCHEDULE (IN MONTHS)												
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
9. Conduct 10-day intensive curriculum.	Facilitators, Coaches, Course Production Team, Situation Intervention Team, Security.	X												
10. Conduct parent orientation.	Project Coordinator.	X												
11. Assign adult mentors and introduce to their youth partners.	Project Coordinator.	X												
12. Conduct monthly mentor coaching sessions.	Project Coordinator.		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
13. Conduct monthly youth and partner follow-through sessions.	Project Coordinator; two Workshop Leaders provided by consultant.		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
14. Manage weekly youth/partner communications.	Project Coordinator.		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
15. Provide life skills counseling, educational and job training, referral and placement.	Project Coordinator; adult mentors.		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

DEVELOP MECHANISMS OF SELF-REGULATION

Orienting Participants

All participants, both staff and clients, must understand their respective roles. Leaders must: (1) clearly communicate the program's rationale, values, and intent; (2) clarify the staff's job descriptions; (3) spell out behavioral expectations, and specify rewards and punishments; and (4) allow staff to ask questions.

Coordinating Activities

Like the conductor of an orchestra, the change agent (with assistance from the individuals and agencies comprising the action system described in Chapter 1) must coordinate the activities of several different individuals and groups. A program's

1. *Maintain consistency:* Make sure that the actual job duties of staff are consistent with their job descriptions. Develop reward systems and incentives for good performance, and communicate to staff what these rewards are. Poor managers tend to wait until something goes wrong, and then blame (or punish) their staff. Proactive managers find that better performance results from communicating clear expectations and rewards. Such rewards include not just money, but privileges, responsibilities, and access to resources. For example, most staff are interested in professional development, and a paid trip to a local or national conference could be a substantial, appreciated reward. Staff development activities are usually permissible budget items if someone had the forethought to include them in a grant proposal.
2. *Maintain clear and frequent communication among staff members, and between staff and supervisors:* Various means can be used—staff meetings, memos, conferences, informal conversations, and performance evaluations. Such mechanisms need to be explicit, though, and must be done on a regular basis. Staff must also feel that their opinions count. The program or agency director should encourage honest opinions and reporting about difficulties as well as successes. Some of the worst programs we have seen are those in which the director communicates a “don’t rock the boat” philosophy, with the result that staff are afraid to report any problems until they reach crisis proportions.
3. *Keep an eye on the timeline:* Make sure that activities required for successful progression from one step to the next are carried out on time (e.g., make sure that staff are hired and trained by the dates specified in the action plan, make sure that all record-keeping forms are printed, and procedures are clearly understood by staff). Imagine if 100 clients had to be turned away because a program was not ready to open when it was supposed to. Perhaps a required staff position was not filled, the office space or meeting space was not ready, or the referring agency had specific reporting requirements that were not met by the program. Such events, although relatively rare, are tragic: the program suffers irreparable damage to its credibility and reputation.

FIGURE 4.2 *Three Guidelines for Coordinating Activities*

departments and individual staff need to be monitored and managed on a regular basis. Program managers must hire and train their staff; they must build good relations with potential referral sources (e.g., police, schools, probation); they must train staff to use required intake forms and keep client records; they must build good relations with citizens and businesses in the neighborhood; and they must provide regular reports of program progress to their funding providers. Three guidelines help ensure smooth coordination (see Figure 4.2).

Managing Resistance and Conflict

Some resistance is inevitable with the start-up of any new program or policy (recall *force field analysis* from Chapter 1). Resistance may come from any of the participants involved: clients, targets, even the program or agency’s own staff (i.e., the action system). Any kind of change threatens people because it creates discomfort and uncertainty. Change challenges long-standing values and views of the world; it introduces risk. If participants have had input into the planning process, resistance can be anticipated and perhaps minimized. However, if resistance surfaces it should be dealt with fairly and seriously.

1. *Avoid the use of force or coercion*: Using force is not often very effective, even when one has legitimate power and authority. Attempts to stifle opposition often create or increase resistance, produce unintended side effects, and lead to intentional subversion of the program's long-term goals.
2. *Try to work for a "win-win" solution, not a "win-lose" outcome*: Look for common ground, if possible. There may be options based upon a principle of exchange (i.e., each party gives up something in order to get something) that would reduce resistance at little cost.
3. *Generate alternatives and options to deal with problems* (i.e., brainstorming): Identify all possible options before evaluating them. Only after a list of options is developed should parties begin discussing costs and benefits of specific strategies or negotiating outcomes (e.g., brainstorming).
4. *Use "principled negotiations"*: There are four basic rules for negotiating fairly (Fisher et al., 2011). First, separate the people from the problem (i.e., don't take it personally). Second, focus on interests, not positions: each party should identify and communicate their needs, preferences, values, or concerns. Each party should understand what elements need to be included in a reasonable solution. Third, invent options for mutual gain: generate new options that are based on shared interests or an exchange of divergent interests. Finally, insist on objective criteria: both parties should agree on what criteria will be used to evaluate possible solutions.

FIGURE 4.3 *Four Guidelines for Conflict Resolution*

Conflict is not something to be avoided at all costs. It may provide the opportunity to identify and resolve misunderstandings, and it may also point out difficulties in implementation that deserve attention. Four general guidelines for conflict resolution are often helpful (see Figure 4.3).

SPECIFY A PLAN TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN SUPPORT

With all the different interests represented by stakeholders and participants, one can expect that some public relations work goes with managing any program or policy, especially criminal justice interventions. The program or agency director is always trying to strengthen sources of support for the program or policy: within the staff, the community, across other agencies with which the program links, with his or her superiors, with the funding agency, with the news media, and with clients. Time for maintaining and increasing support needs to be built into one's schedule, and the person responsible for doing it needs to make sure that different stakeholders are contacted on a regular basis throughout the year.

CONCLUSION

The program or policy in action will never perfectly match the program or policy on paper (i.e., the program or policy design). Developing a good blueprint, or action

plan, however, should markedly reduce subsequent problems with program or policy implementation and will help launch and maintain an effective intervention. So does looking for implementation difficulties, as we will see in Chapter 5.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define and describe the following terms: (a) action planning and (b) resource plan.
2. Describe the purposes (goals) of a resource plan.
3. What does it mean to "estimate the costs involved for each program component"? How does one do this?
4. What is a timeline, or Gantt chart? What does it attempt to do?
5. Describe three guidelines for coordinating activities. Give an example.
6. Describe four guidelines for conflict resolution. Give an example.