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inFocus:
A guide for strategic thinking and improvement planning

ENVISIONING PHASE

PLANNING PHASE

IMPLEMENTING PHASE

EVALUATING PHASE

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Table of Contents

Preface

Cognia developed Strategies on the Cognia Improvement Platform (myJourney) for practitioners looking to move beyond accountability check lists and voluminous improvement plans that gather dust on a shelf. Instead of generating a large impractical plan, following Cognia's strategic thinking and improvement planning process creates a concise, customized **strategy map**. This tangible **output** focuses attention on the **critical initiatives** that will help your institution move forward for three to five years. Strategies enables institution leaders to follow a dynamic planning process to establish actionable strategies to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement that brings value, context, and meaning unique to each institution. In developing this research-based improvement planning process, Cognia was deliberate in its intention to shake up the way most institutions engage in improvement planning.

This four-phased process pushes institutions to become divergent, creative, analytical, and forward thinkers instead of only focusing on the here and the now. To assist institutions with this new approach, Cognia has developed *inFocus: A Guide for Strategic Thinking and Improvement Planning.* This practical Strategies guide helps institution leaders achieve their **vision** for student improvement.

The value of annual planning— short- and long-term planning—is not in the plan itself or even in the powerful Strategies planning tool, the value is in the process that challenges institutions to think, plan, and improve in a whole new way.

Acknowledging continuous improvement is not a destination but a journey, it is our **belief** all institutions can and should improve. Whether underperforming or high achieving—your institution can use Strategies to help identify and meet improvement needs while breaking

out of the tedious and reactive annual planning cycle. This *inFocus* document will guide you through establishing institution **objectives**, critical initiatives, and **influential factors**, and ensure you consider relevant **assumptions** supporting your **mission** and vision. In moving away from strategic planning to strategic thinking and informed reflection, institution leaders will see a singular plan with a holistic view of **current reality**. They also will be able to look ahead five years to see **disruptors** and opportunities on the horizon that may never have been considered before.

Institutions employing the Cognia Continuous Improvement System use the Cognia Improvement Platform suite of tools as a powerful resource to chart their own course for student improvement. The value of Strategies is not in the plan or the dynamic strategy map that fosters thoughtful

implementation, incorporating current data and the impact of **future trends**. Rather, the value is in the process that enables institutions to focus on actionable intelligence to sustain student improvement.

Bring in to focus all of the ways you can break the cycle of reactive or stagnant annual planning. Strategies takes institutions through a dynamic improvement planning process that incorporates both short- and long-term strategies, taking into account current conditions, past successes, and challenges, and looking at future conditions that may impact student learning. Engaging the Strategies process with fidelity will produce a customized plan of action. More importantly, it will empower institution leaders to take ownership of their continuous **improvement journey**. Get ready to bring your continuous improvement planning *inFocus*.

Introduction

Successful Improvement Planning, Continuous Improvement, and the Strategies Tool

How many school improvement plans have you written in your career? How many have you actually read and implemented? How many do you have collecting dust on a bookshelf in your office? Nearly all institutions create excellent, detailed plans—only to leave them untouched after submitting them for approval. The last thing you need is another plan trapped in a three-ring binder serving as a bookend on your shelf. While planning is an important part of the continuous improvement journey, it is not the destination. All you really want is for your students, school, and system to improve—hopefully, year over year.

Cognia defines continuous improvement as "An embedded behavior within a school's culture that constantly focuses on conditions, processes, and practices to improve teaching and learning." (Elgart, 2016). In our quest to create a world of opportunities for every learner, we have cultivated an **Cognia Improvement Network (AIN)** of more than 36,000 institutions across the United States and in 70 countries. As a result, our education experts observe and analyze at least 5,000 institutions each year, enabling us to gain important insights into how continuous improvement practices lead to more effective schools.

Grounded in the belief all schools can improve, our work can be thought of in terms of **Continuous Improvement System (CIS)**. Engaging all stakeholders in common goals is a hallmark of effective continuous improvement. With so much on the line, how can institutions best approach this immense responsibility?

Continuous improvement requires more than the development of a plan. To assist institutions with the strategic thinking and improvement planning process, Cognia has developed Strategies as both a process and a tool. We organize the work of continuous improvement into four phases: 1) Envisioning, 2) Planning, 3) Implementing, and 4) Evaluating. Each phase contains a number of associated sub-phases that together reflect the guidance of the Cognia CIS.

How Does Strategies Work?

Through a guided process of strategic thinking and improvement planning, the web-based Strategies tool makes it easier for institution leaders to undertake a flexible and adaptive process to actualize their vision for improvement. The Strategies application uses a research-based improvement process that takes into account today's landscape and challenges, as well as future opportunities. *inFocus: A Guide for Strategic Thinking and Improvement Planning* can be accessed in the Strategies application as you go through the planning process. It also can be downloaded.

Once the Strategies planning process is integrated into an institution's daily practice, you are well on your way to adopting a personalized improvement journey. Each phase of the process is a how-to guide for continuous improvement. No matter where your institution is in its improvement journey, each phase takes institutions closer to achieving their continuous improvement goals.

By using *inFocus* and Strategies, all of the work you put into continuous improvement is connected through a unified and systematic approach. From seasoned veterans to the novice principal, any educator will find support and guidance in the resources and continuous improvement process used throughout Strategies.

Additional Resources and Tools for Continuous Improvement

Cognia has developed a variety of resources and tools to support your continuous improvement journey. These resources and tools conveniently are located within the Strategies application and can guide you through the Cognia Strategic Thinking and Improvement Planning process.

- *inFocus: A Guide for Strategic Thinking and Improvement Planning*—This resource acts as either a stand-alone guide or a guide for moving through every phase of the Strategies application. The guide helps you stay on course to achieve **intended outcomes**.

- The *inFocus* guide process templates—These templates help institutions engage in meaningful continuous improvement by analyzing, streamlining, and using data:

  Annual Implementation Plan Template

  Annual Improvement Template

  Categorize the Trends Template

  Cluster the Information Template

  Future Trends and Sources Template

  Guiding Principles Template

  Information that Matters Template

  Objectives and Key Measures Template

  Progress Monitor Card Template

  Stakeholders Most Impacted Template

  Stakeholder Responsibility Card Template

  Strategic Themes and Priority

  Statements Template

  Strategy Map Template

  Theory of Action Template

- *Glossary*—This resource defines and clarifies newly introduced or specialized terms specific to *inFocus: A Guide for Strategic Thinking and Improvement Planning.*

- As your institution embarks on its improvement journey, Cognia's Strategies and *inFocus* guide process provide the resources, tools, and guidance for sustainable continuous improvement. Continuous improvement isn't easy, but it can be worthwhile and rewarding. Follow the Cognia Strategic Thinking and Improvement Planning process to get started seeing actionable, sustainable results.

Are you ready to bring your continuous improvement planning *inFocus*?

Let's get started!

A Measured Approach to Continuous Improvement: Leveraging Theories of Action

The term *improvement* implies movement from a point of relative weakness to a place of relative strength. Improvements should not be accidental but rather a result of intentional and careful planning. In fact, this is the foundation of a continuous improvement plan: to develop and articulate a predetermined course of action for moving from weakness to strength. Though plans differ from institution to institution, what unifies every continuous improvement plan at the fundamental level is a belief that the identified actions will have a positive impact on important outcomes. When formalized, this belief can be explained and evaluated as a **theory of action**.

A theory of action has a number of components. Together, these components create a reasoning map that explicitly displays how an institution thinks its mission-based work will ensure the institution achieves its objectives and realizes its vision. The associated "work" the institution commits to along this path is guided by critical initiatives. A strong theory of action also makes explicit those resources required to accomplish critical initiatives, **key measures** of success,

outcomes produced, and other influential factors that may impact the work.

Finally, and perhaps most important, a theory of action contains the assumptions you have made regarding each critical initiative. In other words, at some point, you identified an optimal way (critical initiative) to address a particular problem. The decision to choose that particular critical initiative relied on certain assumptions as to how it would lead to important changes. Including these assumptions in a theory of action ensures you are reminded throughout the planning process of the reasoning behind your decisions and efforts.

The inclusion of assumptions is especially helpful when it comes time for evaluating stakeholder efforts. For example, an institution's outcomes at the end of the year may indicate student scores in reading increased—perhaps even beyond what leadership predicted.

At first glance, this might suggest the new professional development opportunities the institution added were very effective. However, a closer inspection might indicate

otherwise. If the theory of action included the assumption that the critical initiative calling for new approaches to professional development would change classroom instruction, leading to improved student outcomes, then for the plan to be effective, instruction would need to have changed as well. If a review of the year's data shows instructional methods remained the same as the prior year, then the assumption was not satisfied, and the plan cannot be ruled a clear success regardless of the improved outcomes.

Many continuous improvement teams go through the process of informally developing theories of action but do not capture their decisions in a concrete way.

THEORY OF ACTION IN USE IN EACH PHASE

	ENVISIONING	Input • Mission • Vision Populates the Theory of Action Template
	PLANNING	Input • Objectives • Critical Initiatives • Assumptions • Intended Outcomes • Key Measures • Influential Factors Populates the Theory of Action Template
	IMPLEMENTING	Input • Resources Populates the Theory of Action Template
	EVALUATING	If working through Strategies from beginning to end, use the complete (pre-populated) template to assess effectiveness of critical initiatives. If completing the Evaluating Phase by itself, manually input factors into the Theory of Action Template and then assess effectiveness of critical initiatives.

Fortunately, Strategies was designed to capture outputs from the multiple stages of continuous improvement planning and compile them in an easy-to-follow **Theory of Action Template**. In each of the four phases, guiding questions and templates help generate the information needed for completing a theory of action for each critical initiative.

The continuous improvement planning process that guides Strategies provides the flexibility for you to begin the process no matter where you are on your improvement journey. This has important implications regarding the Theory of Action Template. If you already have completed the work of Envisioning, Planning, and Implementing outside of the Strategies application, you may enter this information in the application easily. If you're just getting started, allow the application to guide you through the process.

Determining the success or failure of an initiative or plan is a complicated and nuanced process requiring the expertise of dedicated stakeholders and leaders like you. By organizing the institution's choices into theories of action (one per critical initiative), you can articulate and evaluate your work and the reasoning behind it in a clear and logical manner.

We hope you find this resource to be an empowering tool for guiding and assessing your efforts along your continuous **improvement journey**.

PHASE 1: ENVISIONING

Purpose

The **Envisioning Phase** expands an institution's view of its current reality and potential future to establish a foundation for decision-making around goals and strategies. This phase builds upon what institutions typically do well (assess their current reality) and guides leadership through a process to examine future trends that could significantly impact the institution's future success. Understanding current reality is important, as it provides a snapshot of the institution's everyday experiences through the lens of learners and other key stakeholders in its community. To understand its reality, an institution typically uses data from its past. To envision its future, an institution must pay attention to patterns, disruptors, and trends that could be a source of ongoing issues or the levers of positive change. The three subphases of Envisioning are featured in the Overview of Envisioning Phase.

> "The first step toward creating an improved future is developing the ability to envision it."
>
> —Unknown

Overview of Envisioning Phase

SUBPHASE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	WHAT TO DO	WHY IT IS IMPORTANT
Determine the current reality	What is the institution's current reality? How does the institution know?	Select and analyze information to understand current reality. Make connections to identify topics and themes.	Provides a starting point for understanding the institution's possibilities.
Explore the future	What factors will drive change in education the next 10 years? Which stakeholder groups will be most impacted? How does the institution know?	Comb through a variety of sources to gain insight about the future. Categorize results into four areas or factors. Determine stakeholder groups most impacted by factors.	Gives guidance and potential levers for long-term improvement.
Synthesize results	What are the connections and gaps between the future and current reality? What are the big ideas or strategic themes for each priority statement? Do the institution's existing guiding principles align with the priority statements? How does the institution know?	Determine connections and gaps between current reality and future priorities. Turn the connections into priority statements. Ensure institution's guiding principles align with the priority statements.	Creates connections and identifies gaps for short- and long-term improvement.

SUBPHASE 1: DETERMINE THE CURRENT REALITY		
GUIDING QUESTIONS	▶ ▶ ▶	**ACTIONS**
What is the current reality?		• Review and analyze information sets to understand institution's current reality.
How does the institution know?		• Use results to make informed conclusions about current reality.

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Determines what sets of information are most relevant and accessible for review.* This is an important first step in the process to understand the institution's current reality. By making decisions about the types of information that are easily accessible, relevant, qualitative and quantitative, you are identifying information that provides a clear picture of the institution's current reality. Using multiple years of prior data has an important role in understanding an institution. However, for this exercise, it is recommended data be more "real-time" rather than historical. Focus on retrievable and relevant information for the following stakeholder groups:

   • Learners
   • Institution
   • Institution's community

2. *Analyzes information sets and determines what was learned.* Conduct a thorough review of the information set for each stakeholder group. Keep this analysis at as high or as granular a level as appropriate. It is important to remember you are not writing objectives during this process but attempting to obtain a big picture of the learners, the institution, and its community through filters, including perceptions, achievements, and demographic or profile-like data. The simple question, "What did we learn?" can guide you through this step.

3. *Makes connections from the information to identify topics or themes of the current reality.* In this step, conduct a comprehensive review of all the "what we learned" analyses, and identify connections or patterns to categorize by learners, institution, and community. This summary information will be used in the last subphase, so it is important to identify these connections.

Resource for this Subphase:
• Information That Matters Template

SUBPHASE 2: EXPLORE THE FUTURE

GUIDING QUESTIONS	▶ ▶ ▶	ACTIONS

What factors will drive change in education over the next 10 years?

Which stakeholder group will be most impacted?

How does the institution know for sure?

- Discuss the future and how future trends impact education.
- Gain insight into how stakeholder groups will be impacted by these trends.
- Determine which trends become priorities to address.
- Use results to make informed conclusions about the current reality.

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Engages in readings, reviews virtual information, shares insights and experiences to learn about future trends.* This exercise helps focus on emergent patterns not yet considered to be a trend and pay attention to emerging disruptors that may impact the institution's future. Without judgment, it is important to read, observe, and talk with young people regarding their habits, attitudes, behaviors, and likes and dislikes to gain insights into future trends.

2. *Categorizes each trend through the lens of social, technological, economic, and political factors.* Once trends have been shared and discussed through a broad lens, determine if the trend is a social, technological, economic, or political factor. Engaging in this categorization exercise helps to stimulate discussion and fine-tune the list of trends.

3. *Determines the stakeholder group most impacted by each trend.* Discuss each trend to make decisions about the stakeholder group most impacted should this trend come to fruition. Additionally, consider being realistic about 1) knowing which trends are within the institution's purview of control and responsibilities; 2) selecting the trends that are opportunities for improvement and sustainability; and 3) agreeing which trends could become priorities to address later.

Resources for this Subphase:

- Future Trends and Sources Template
- Categorize the Trends Template
- Stakeholders Most Impacted Template

SUBPHASE 3: SYNTHESIZE RESULTS

GUIDING QUESTIONS ▶▶▶	ACTIONS
What are the connections and gaps between the future and current reality?	• Discuss the future and how future trends impact education.
What are the big ideas or strategic themes for each priority statement?	• Gain insight into how stakeholder groups will be impacted by these trends.
Do the institution's existing guiding principles align with the future priority statements?	• Determine which trends might become priorities to address during the short and long terms.
How does the institution know?	• Choose a big idea or strategic theme to capture the essence of each future priority.
	• Use results to make informed conclusions about current reality.

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Identifies the gaps and connections between the current reality and the future priorities*. Now that the leadership team has spent time understanding the institution's reality and thinking through possible future trends, these two separate sets of information are viewed in an integrated manner. Look for ways the two align and where there are gaps or no/limited connections.

2. *Develops priority statements that reflect the connections or gaps*. Refer to the determined connections or gaps from the previous step, and write statements to represent the findings. For example, the following question can be used to guide the development of the synthesis statements: "*If one of our future priorities is _____, what current reality do we need to change to realize the future?*" If the future priority does not connect with a current reality or vice-versa, leave this information blank. There should not be a forced connection.

3. *Determines the strategic theme for each priority statement*. Once the future priority statements are completed, think about the clear message each statement conveys. A simple question to ask is, "What is the theme or big idea of the priority statement?" Simplifying the statement will make communication to stakeholders much easier.

4. *Reviews, revises, and/or develops vision and mission statements to ensure alignment*. Take a fresh look at the institution's vision and mission statements now that the reality and future have been examined. Disaggregate the words in the institution's guiding principles, such as the vision, mission, and beliefs; there could be alignment or misalignment between the current guiding principles and the newly identified priorities. Invest time to ensure all guiding principles and priorities align and convey the same messages.

Resources for this Subphase:

- Strategic Themes and Priority Statements Template

- Guiding Principles Template

- Cluster the Information Template

Theory of Action: Envisioning

A thoughtfully crafted **theory of action** provides an explicit model that explains how the institution's plans lead to desired outcomes. A well-constructed theory of action also serves as a tool for evaluation while work is in progress and upon completion. As a result of the Envisioning Phase, you have confirmed the institution's mission and vision statements. These two items will appear on every theory of action that institution leaders create and serve as a reminder that all planning efforts are guided by those fundamental elements.

Note: If you have been entering your information in Strategies, the information entered is automatically populated.

THEORY OF ACTION BY PHASE

ENVISIONING	Input
	Vision
	Mission
	Output
	Populates the Theory of Action Template

Envisioning Phase Templates

Subphase 1: Determine the current reality.

STEP 1

Complete and **use** the **Information That Matters Template** as an organizer to 1) list information that is current and easily accessible for each category; and 2) write a concise summary of what you learned about the information.

Remember that for the purpose of this subphase, pouring over years and mounds of data will bog down the process and result in difficulty understanding the current reality. This phase is about understanding the institution's current reality through three lenses: **the learners, the institution, and the community**.

STEP 2

Use the guiding questions to understand what you have learned for each stakeholder. There are guiding questions to assist in viewing the current reality from the learners' perspective, the institution's perspective, and the community's perspective.

The Learner

Ask questions like:

What did we learn from a review of the...

- learner achievement data? What is obvious?
- learner perceptions? What is obvious?
- learner behaviors? What is obvious?

The Institution

Ask questions like:

What did we learn from a review of the...

- institution profile data? What is obvious?
- stakeholders' perceptions? What is obvious?
- institution-generated information (e.g., observations, professional development, focus groups)? What is obvious?

KEY TIPS

» **Ensure information is relevant to the stakeholder group.**

» **Make information quickly accessible.**

» **Focus on current information (not older than one-two years).**

The Community

Ask questions like:

What did we learn from a review of the...

- community profile data? What is obvious?
- community partnership/volunteer data? What is obvious?

See the following examples of the **Information That Matters Template** for each stakeholder group.

Information That Matters Template – The Learner

CATEGORY OF INFORMATION	STEP 1 INFORMATION THAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND CURRENT	STEP 2 WHAT WE LEARNED
LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT		
LEARNER PERCEPTIONS		
LEARNER BEHAVIORS		

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

CATEGORY OF INFORMATION	STEP 1 INFORMATION THAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND CURRENT	STEP 2 WHAT WE LEARNED
LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT	• Fourth and fifth grade Reading Comprehension standardized test results • Second and third grade Math Problem Solving standardized test results	• Male students score lower on reading comprehension than female students in the same grade levels; English Language Learner (ELL) students score significantly lower on reading comprehension • ELL students score lower on the Math Problem Solving areas
LEARNER PERCEPTIONS	• Student inventory results for third through fifth grades • Student culture/climate survey results for grades 3–5	• Students in third grade have a more positive experience in school than fifth grade students • Students in these grades most frequently cited that they listen to teachers, complete worksheets, memorize, and work alone
LEARNER BEHAVIORS	• Promotion/retention data for grades 1–5 • Attendance data for grades 1–5	• ELL students have higher retention rate in grades 3–5 • ELL students have higher absentee rate than non-ELL students

Information That Matters Template – The Institution

CATEGORY OF INFORMATION	STEP 1 INFORMATION THAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND CURRENT	STEP 2 WHAT WE LEARNED
INSTITUTION PROFILE/ PUBLIC SELF		
STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS		
STUDENT OBSERVATIONS		

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

CATEGORY OF INFORMATION	STEP 1 INFORMATION THAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND CURRENT	STEP 2 WHAT WE LEARNED
SCHOOL PROFILE/ PUBLIC SELF	• Teacher retention/mobility; socio-economic level of overall school population; teacher credentials and experience	• High teacher turnover rate in fifth grade • Thirty percent of teachers have master's degrees
STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS	• Parent culture/climate survey results • Teacher Inventory results	• Positive parent perception results about school; low response rate • Inventory results indicate lack of interaction with instructional coaches and a need for training on ELL intervention strategies
STUDENT OBSERVATIONS	• Classroom observations of students interacting with learning in grades 2–5 (total 50 observations)	• Overall, students in grades two and three were more actively engaged than in grades 4–5 • Students not observed using technology during reading and science instructional times

Information That Matters Template – The Community

CATEGORY OF INFORMATION	STEP 1 INFORMATION THAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND CURRENT	STEP 2 WHAT WE LEARNED
COMMUNITY PROFILE DATA		
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/ PARTNERSHIPS		

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

CATEGORY OF INFORMATION	STEP 1 INFORMATION THAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND CURRENT	STEP 2 WHAT WE LEARNED
COMMUNITY PROFILE DATA	• Demographics, types of businesses, average education level of adults, number of post-secondary institutions	• New technology company opening in one year • Decrease in number of adults enrolled in post-secondary institutions • Average education level is dropping; currently at eleventh grade or its equivalent
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/ PARTNERSHIPS	• Number of partnerships with local businesses • Number of volunteer hours from community members/partnership employees	• Five "thriving" partnerships • Increase in volunteer hours; increase in retired community members volunteering in school (tutoring students)

Subphase 2: Explore the future.

STEP 1

Complete and **use** the **Future Trends and Sources Template** to begin a discussion about factors that could impact education and/or the institution in the next 10 years.

After reviewing literature, combing through information and looking for clues about the future, list these trends in the first column. Be sure to list trends and their sources to ensure credibility.

KEY TIPS

» **Read future trends literature from professions outside of education.**

» **Talk to learners of all ages to ask what they think.**

» **Think in terms of new ideas that might disrupt the norm.**

» **If nothing surprises the team, then the team might be missing something.**

The Future Trends and Sources Template

FUTURE TREND	HOW DO WE KNOW

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

FUTURE TREND	HOW DO WE KNOW
Everything is moving faster—speeding up	• Instant information, easy access for everyone, short and fast communication
Information, items to purchase, etc., is personalized	• Personalized retail items (shoes, soft drinks), websites and apps for personalized services, personalized medicine based on genetic makeup, personalized meals at restaurants
More intense focus on safety	• Increased security at public events, places, transportation, homes
Increased use of robots, smart advisors, virtual personal assistants	• Virtual assistants
Virtual communication	• Decrease in use of land lines, mail, and increase in short, digital messages

STEP 2

Use the list of trends to complete the **Categorize the Trends Template**. When engaging in this **activity**, know there might be more trends listed in one or two categories.

There is no need to have an even number of trends for each category; however, if there is one category with a full list while others have a much shorter list, you might want to re-engage in the future trends activity. In other words, perhaps the future thinking was not broad enough.

KEY TIPS

» **Be certain to know the difference between economic and political trends.**

» **Engage in discussions when categorizing. This is not a one-person activity.**

» **Ensure the completed Categorize the Trends Template shows broad thinking.**

Categorize the Trends Template

SOCIAL TREND	TECHNOLOGICAL TREND	ECONOMIC TREND	POLITICAL TREND

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

SOCIAL TREND	TECHNOLOGICAL TREND	ECONOMIC TREND	POLITICAL TREND
More intense focus on safety	Increased use of robots, smart advisors, virtual personal assistants	Reduction in imports	Local vs. global
Information, items to purchase, etc., is personalized	Access to data	Growth in healthcare occupations	Virtual communication
Everything is moving faster—speeding up	Cyber security	Increase in interest rates, inflation	Media, reporting, and what is real information
Changes in regional demographics	3D printing	Salaries/wages stagnant	Anti-establishment movement

STEP 3

Use the information from the **Categorize the Trends Template** to determine which stakeholder group will be most impacted by each trend should it come to fruition. Discuss each trend, determine which stakeholder group will be most impacted, and designate your decision by placing a unique symbol on the chart to represent the stakeholder group.

Upon completion of this exercise, you should view holistically the symbols, and determine which trends and stakeholder groups are within the institution's realm of control. A few examples are provided on the Lincoln Elementary School Template.

Stakeholders Most Impacted Template

SOCIAL TREND	TECHNOLOGICAL TREND	ECONOMIC TREND	POLITICAL TREND

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

Key: Learners   School   Community

SOCIAL TREND	TECHNOLOGICAL TREND	ECONOMIC TREND	POLITICAL TREND
More intense focus on safety	Increased use of robots, smart advisors, virtual personal assistants	Reduction in imports	Local vs. global
Information, items to purchase, etc., is personalized	Access to data	Growth in healthcare occupations	Virtual communication
Everything is moving faster—speeding up	Cyber security	Increase in interest rates, inflation	Media, reporting, and what is real information
Changes in regional demographics	3D printing	Salaries/wages stagnant	Anti-establishment movement

Subphase 3: Synthesize Results.

STEP 1

Use the **Cluster the Information Template** to list the institution's top three to five future priorities, and place them in their respective category. Next, match the current reality to the trend. Remember to think about the connections or impacts the future can have on reality and vice versa.

Once the connections are set, think about the big idea or strategic theme for each priority statement.

KEY TIPS

» **Use the Categorize the Trends and Stakeholders Most Impacted Templates to complete this activity.**

» **If you are having difficulty completing the activity, go back to the previous templates and discuss the information again.**

» **It is okay if there is not a match or connection for every trend and current reality item.**

» **It is possible to have multiple priorities per trend.**

Cluster the Information Template

SOCIAL	TECHNOLOGICAL	ECONOMIC	POLITICAL
Future Priority	Future Priority	Future Priority	Future Priority
Current Reality	Current Reality	Current Reality	Current Reality

Future Priority	Current Reality

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

SOCIAL	TECHNOLOGICAL	ECONOMIC	POLITICAL
More intense focus on safety	Robots, smart advisors, virtual personal assistants	Salaries/wages stagnant	Virtual communication (tweeting, social media)
No connection to current reality	Minimal use of technology during class time	Teacher turnover high; 60 percent new teachers every two years Minimal postsecondary opportunities for adults	Stakeholders pleased with communication from school Community engagement lacking; change in demographics
Personalization			
Literacy skills declining for English Language Learners			

Future Priority	Current Reality

STEP 2

Complete the **Strategic Themes and Priority Statements Template**. Each priority statement has a central theme or big idea. Take each priority statement and drill down to the essence of the concept using the one- or two-word theme as an organizer.

KEY TIPS

» Let the information flow from the previous chart. There is no new information here.

» Think about this exercise as an "if and then" statement.

» Keep it simply stated so all stakeholders understand the context.

Strategic Themes and Priority Statements Template

FUTURE PRIORITY	CURRENT REALITY	PRIORITY STATEMENT	STRATEGIC THEME
Use statement or terms from Cluster the Information Template.	Use the current reality phrase from Cluster the Information Template.	If _____ is the future priority, then what current reality needs to change to realize the future? What is the alignment?	Ask: What is the big idea or strategic theme of the future priority?

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

FUTURE PRIORITY	CURRENT REALITY	PRIORITY STATEMENT	STRATEGIC THEME
Personalization	Students need to improve their literacy skills to be ready for middle school.	Implementing personalized learning instruction can improve student readiness for middle school.	Personalized Learning Experiences
Virtual communication (tweeting, social media)	Stakeholders pleased with communication from school, but overall engagement is lacking.	Using a variety of virtual communication methods can improve stakeholder engagement.	Stakeholder Engagement

STEP 3

Complete the **Guiding Principles Template**. The purpose of this step is to ensure all guiding principles align with the institution's new priority statements.

If the institution's vision, mission, and set of beliefs need to be revised because there is misalignment with the priorities, take the opportunity to update the language and check for the accuracy of each statement. For example, some institutions might find their mission statement contains sections that read more closely like a vision statement and vice versa. This is not an uncommon practice, but it is not considered a best practice. Although there are three separate guiding principles, each one should connect to the other. The guidelines below reflect best practices for the revision or development of each guiding principle.

KEY TIPS

» **Engage stakeholders to develop or revise the institution's guiding principles.**

» **Ensure the vision and mission statements are written concisely so they are easily remembered and therefore embraced.**

» **Eliminate any educational jargon from the guiding principles.**

Guidelines

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	DESCRIPTION	BEST PRACTICES
Vision statement	Communicates the future the institution strives to achieve	Use inspiring words that are clear to anyone; keep statement to less than 30 words; use future tense
Mission statement	Communicates why the institution exists	Use words that are clear to anyone; write concise statements; keep statement to less than 30 words; use present tense
Beliefs	Communicates what the institution holds as its fundamental criteria guiding all decisions and actions; what the institution knows to be true	Use words that align with the mission and vision statements; can be stated as bulleted items; keep the list of beliefs succinct so they are easily remembered

For this template, review the vision, mission, and beliefs statements, and determine if there is an alignment with the new direction for the future. If not, engage in discussions and decision-making to revise the guiding principles. It is important everything is moving in the same direction.

Note: The future priorities to be included in the Guiding Principles Template should be taken from the Cluster the Information Template.

Guiding Principles Template

VISION	MISSION	BELIEFS	FUTURE PRIORITY	ALIGNMENT OR REVISION?

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

Vision: Our vision is that every student is achieving at his or her maximum potential in an engaging, inspiring, and challenging environment.

Mission: To ensure all students receive a world-class education that prepares them for success in college, career and life.

Beliefs: We believe all students can learn given equitable opportunities. It is our responsibility to prepare students for the future and provide a safe and secure learning environment.

VISION	MISSION	BELIEFS	FUTURE PRIORITY	ALIGNMENT OR REVISION?
Every student	All students	Equity	Personalization Robots, smart advisors, virtual personal assistants	Alignment
Maximum potential	Prepares them for success	All can learn		Alignment
Engaging, inspiring, and challenging environment	World-class education College, career, and life	Responsibility to prepare them for the future	Media, reporting, and what is real information Virtual communication (tweeting, social media)	Alignment
		Responsibility to provide a safe and secure learning environment	More intense focus on safety	Alignment
			Stagnant salaries	N/A

Embracing your past and understanding your current reality places you on a clear path to **envisioning** the future.

PHASE 2: PLANNING
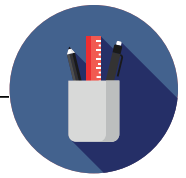
Purpose

The **Planning Phase** is the phase in which the continuous improvement team works toward organizing how priorities will be addressed. The unique context of your institution is an important factor in this process, as is the continuous improvement team's specific approach and philosophy to drive positive change in the institution.
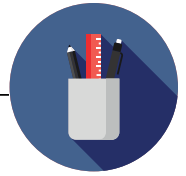
The Planning Phase is all about identifying actions and measures, prioritizing these actions, and communicating the information to the institution's stakeholders. The subphases of Planning are featured in the Overview of Planning Phase.

"Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now."

—Alan Lakein, writer

Overview of Planning Phase

SUBPHASE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	WHAT TO DO	WHY IT IS IMPORTANT
Use priorities to create objectives and identify critical initiatives	What are the objectives that address the priorities? What critical initiatives will enable the institution to achieve the objectives?	Turn each priority into an objective. Use evidence-based practices to address and achieve each objective.	Allows time to plan for the institution's long- and short-term improvement based on identified priorities.
Identify outcomes and key measures for each critical initiative	What is the intended outcome of each critical initiative? What are the key measures for each critical initiative?	Determine the result institution leaders expect from each critical initiative. Decide how each critical initiative will be assessed or measured for its effectiveness.	Establishes desired results of critical initiatives' implementation; helps to define relationships between outputs and outcomes.
Develop Strategy Map	What information about improvement planning does the institution share with its stakeholders? How is the information communicated to stakeholders?	Use a visual representation to show the institution's long-term direction for improvement. Identify ways to communicate the long-term direction with stakeholders.	Provides a concise, comprehensive summary of the institution's improvement plan to share with all stakeholders.
Develop Annual Plan	What does the institution want to accomplish during the coming year?	Decide what the institution's focus is for the first year, and tentatively plan for subsequent years. Develop the **Annual Improvement Plan**.	Ensures the Annual Improvement Plan has priorities to focus on for the coming year.

SUBPHASE 1: USE PRIORITIES TO CREATE OBJECTIVES AND IDENTIFY CRITICAL INITIATIVES

GUIDING QUESTIONS	▶ ▶ ▶	ACTIONS

What are the objectives that address the priorities in the short and long term?
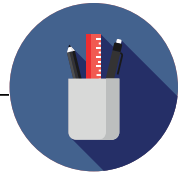
What critical initiatives will enable the institution to achieve the objectives?

- Address priorities by creating objectives for the short- and long-term improvement of the institution.
- Determine evidence-based critical initiatives to implement and achieve each objective.

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Creates an objective to address each priority.* It is now time to determine a set of priorities for the institution to address over the next three to five years. This already may have been completed prior to the Planning Phase. Use these priorities and their strategic themes to discuss and answer the question, "How will the institution achieve the priority?" to determine the objective or objectives for each priority. In the Lincoln Elementary School example, a priority was "personalization," and its respective strategic theme was "personalized learning experiences." To turn this priority and strategic theme into an objective, you might write the objective like this: "Provide active and personalized learning opportunities to support student readiness for middle school." Note the priority did not change; it was reworded to provide a more realistic, specific, and tangible statement that gives direction to address the priority. An institution might have more than one objective for a priority, but the ideal objective statement is written at a high level (without specifics) to avoid writing multiple objectives.

2. *Determines evidence-based critical initiatives to reach the objectives.* You are now ready to address each objective. To do this, find implementable, evidence-based practices that will achieve each objective. Critical initiatives answer the question, "What actions can the institution take to achieve the objective?" These critical initiatives or evidence-based practices should be sequenced to ensure an appropriate workflow (order of critical initiatives). Write the critical initiatives clearly but not granularly; in other words, the statements give direction but not specific details.

3. *Explicitly states the assumptions regarding the effectiveness of each critical initiative.* In developing plans to achieve the institution's objectives, you must choose to pursue certain critical initiatives instead of others. Each of these choices should be made based on details of how and why the approach should be successful. By making these beliefs or assumptions explicit, you can defend your actions throughout the year and properly evaluate the work of stakeholders.

Resource for this Subphase:

• Objectives and Key Measures Template

SUBPHASE 2: IDENTIFY OUTCOMES AND KEY MEASURES FOR EACH CRITICAL INITIATIVE	
GUIDING QUESTIONS ▶ ▶ ▶	ACTIONS
What is the intended outcome of each critical initiative?	• Identify the intended outcome of each critical initiative.
What are the key measures for each critical initiative?	• Determine the key measures for each critical initiative.
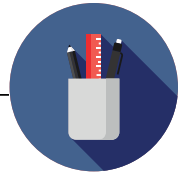
What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Identifies intended outcome of each critical initiative.* To build an effective theory of action, you need to specify the expected outcomes when each critical initiative is implemented. In other words, what does the institution want to happen as a result of the institution's focus on the critical initiative? Identifying the intended outcome for each critical initiative makes it possible to connect short-term improvements to longer-term objectives.

2. *Determines the key measures for each critical initiative.* It is important institutions have access to a variety of data for monitoring and evaluating the implementation and impact of the critical initiatives. Key measures answer the question, "How will the institution know it is achieving the objective?" You might consider key measures that provide information on the performance of the institution, conditions that impact performance, accountability data, and perception data from its stakeholders. Identify these sources for all critical initiatives.

3. *Identifies and records factors outside the critical initiative's scope most likely to impact desired outcomes.* Institutions do not operate in a vacuum. Myriad forces inside and outside of the institution can influence the outcomes of a critical initiative, even if those factors are not a part of the plan. It is likely you can think of many examples, but it is best to only record the three or four most likely to have an effect. Considering the role of these factors is a crucial part of the eventual evaluation of critical initiatives.

Resource for this Subphase:

- Objectives and Key Measures Template

SUBPHASE 3: DEVELOP STRATEGY MAP	
GUIDING QUESTIONS ▶ ▶ ▶	ACTIONS
What information about improvement planning does the institution share with its stakeholders?	• Create a visual representation (Strategy Map) of the institution's direction for improvement.
How is the information communicated to its stakeholders?	• Share the Strategy Map with stakeholders.

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Generates Strategy Map.* As a result of the previous subphases, a significant amount of information has been assimilated. This information, when formatted into a single yet comprehensive diagram such as a Strategy Map, can be used as a visual representation of the institution's overall direction for its future. Before sharing the Strategy Map with stakeholders, a thorough review should be conducted of all of the information on the Strategy Map to ensure the mission, vision, beliefs, priorities, objectives, critical initiatives, and key measures reflect the decisions made in the previous subphases. The key to an effective and concise Strategy Map is to keep the information clear but at a high level. Remember, this is a communication tool that shows the institution's direction and not its detailed plan.

2. *Shares Strategy Map with stakeholders.* The Strategy Map is an easy way to communicate the institution's big-picture direction for the next three to five years with all stakeholders. Although the institution probably has involved stakeholders all along to make decisions, it is unlikely all staff members, parents, and community members see the institution's big picture. Sharing the Strategy Map on the institution's website, social media pages, and during meetings can serve as a way to keep everyone moving in the same direction with the same information.

Resource for this Subphase:

- Strategy Map Template

SUBPHASE 4: DEVELOP ANNUAL PLAN	
GUIDING QUESTIONS ▶▶▶	ACTIONS
What does the institution want to accomplish during the coming year?	• Decide on year one's focus for improvement planning, and tentatively plan the subsequent years' foci. • Complete the Annual Improvement Plan.

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Makes decisions about the institution's focus for the coming year.* Once you have established the institution's Strategy Map, it is important to identify the focus for year one and, ideally, have a vision for the order of the priorities, objectives, and critical initiatives for subsequent years. The order might change, but it is important to establish a tentative sequence of improvement work so each year's plan builds on the ones before it. Take into consideration the institution's human and resource capacities, the scope of the critical initiatives, and current reality. Also, think how one strategic theme might impact another one. If the strategic themes are connected, meaning one supports the achievement of another, the institution might decide to select all of the strategic themes to address during the coming year and prioritize the sets of critical initiatives.
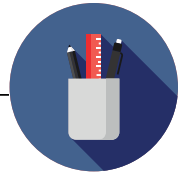
2. *Generates an Annual Improvement Plan.* In much the same way that the Strategy Map captures the long-term direction for the institution's improvement journey, the Annual Improvement Plan provides a summary of the institution's focus for one year. All of the information for the Annual Improvement Plan has been completed as a result of the previous subphases.

Resource for this Subphase:

- Annual Improvement Plan Template

Theory of Action: Planning

A thoughtfully crafted theory of action helps an institution by providing an explicit model explaining how plans lead to desired outcomes. A well-constructed theory of action also serves as a tool for evaluation while work is in progress and upon completion. During the Planning Phase, you created objectives and critical initiatives. You also identified the key measures and intended outcomes associated with each. You also made explicit the assumptions that explain why each critical initiative should be successful and listed influential factors that might impact success. These components compose the majority of the information on the theory of action.

Note: If you have been entering your information in Strategies, the information entered is automatically populated.

THEORY OF ACTION BY PHASE

PLANNING	Input
	• Objectives
	• Critical Initiatives
	• Assumptions (*inFocus* guide only)
	• Intended Outcomes
	• Key Measures
	• Influential Factors (*inFocus* guide only)
	Output
	• Populates the Theory of Action Template
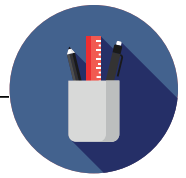
Planning Phase Templates

Subphase 1: Use Priorities to Create Objectives and Identify Critical Initiatives.

Subphase 2: Identify Outcomes and Key Measures for Each Critical Initiative.

Complete and **use** the **Objectives and Key Measures Template** as an organizing tool to put key information in one chart. Begin by selecting a priority and strategic theme, and continue through the six steps listed in the template. Note that each priority and strategic theme has its own objective, set of critical initiatives, intended outcomes, and key measures.

STEP 1

Use the priority statement and its strategic theme as the guiding organizer to write the **objective** statement. The objective statement answers the question, "How are we going to achieve the priority?"

STEP 2

Complete this exercise for each priority and objective statement. Each objective statement needs accompanying evidence-based practices or **critical initiatives** for the institution to implement.

STEP 3

Identify the intended outcome the institution will strive to achieve for each critical initiative.

STEP 4

Explicitly state what the institution believes regarding how and why each critical initiative will be successful upon execution when writing the **assumptions**.

KEY TIPS

» Write objective statements that can be communicated clearly to stakeholders— refrain from writing measurable outcomes in the statements.

» Select critical initiatives from research and respected practitioner-oriented literature.

» Consider the institution's reality and future when determining the critical initiatives, intended outcomes, and key measures.
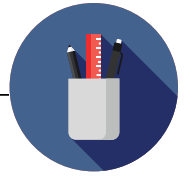
STEP 5

Decide on three or four (keep the quantity small) factors that could influence the success of the critical initiatives. **Influential factors** are outside the institution's control but have the potential to change the critical initiatives' intended outcomes.

STEP 6

Determine appropriate indicators or **key measures** that track the progress and achievement of the critical initiatives. Each critical initiative can have one or multiple means to measure its effectiveness and/or performance.

Objectives and Key Measures Template

PRIORITY:		STRATEGIC THEME: (REFER TO THE STRATEGY MAP)		
OBJECTIVE: **STEP 1**				
Critical Initiatives **STEP 2**	Intended Outcomes **STEP 3**	Assumptions **STEP 4**	Influential Factors **STEP 5**	Key Measures **STEP 6**

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

PRIORITY: Personalization		STRATEGIC THEME: Personalized Learning Experiences		
OBJECTIVE: Provide more active, personalized learning opportunities to support student readiness for middle school				
Critical Initiatives	Intended Outcomes	Assumptions	Influential Factors	Key Measures
• Invest in curriculum materials aligned to/in support of instructional practices that promote personalized learning.	• Teachers will have resources necessary to implement active reading strategies with fidelity.	• Aligning curriculum to instruction maximizes learning.	• School board's budgeting process and approval for curriculum materials	• Materials inventories; curriculum distribution lists • Classroom walkthrough data
• Provide professional development for personalized learning.	• All staff will gain knowledge necessary to transition into personalized learning instruction.	• Professional development is an effective approach to improving teacher behaviors. • Teachers will gain new skills.	• Effectiveness/quality of teacher training	• Teacher surveys • Classroom observation; teacher evaluation
• Implement personalized learning program to increase student engagement.	• Students will be more engaged in learning and demonstrate better performance on readiness measures.	• Teachers will implement strategies according to training. • Personalized learning practices will increase student engagement. • Increased student engagement will lead to higher reading scores.	• Stakeholders' reactions to or acceptance of personalized learning approach	• Student engagement survey; classroom observations • Student performance on readiness benchmarks (reading, math)

Subphase 3: Develop Strategy Map.

Complete the **Strategy Map Template**. Use the information from the previous exercises to develop the institution's Strategy Map.

KEY TIPS

» Check to be sure the correct information is transferred to the Strategy Map.

» Keep the institution's stakeholders in mind when completing the Strategy Map. It is meant to be a communication tool that conveys the institution's direction.

» Keep the statements digestible to a broad audience.

The Strategy Map Template

Vision	Mission	Beliefs

Strategic Theme	Strategic Theme	Strategic Theme

Objectives	Objectives	Objectives
Critical Initiatives	Critical Initiatives	Critical Initiatives
Key Measures	Key Measures	Key Measures

Source: Template image from Cognia Strategies application.

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

Vision
Our vision is that every student is achieving at his or her maximum potential in an engaging, inspiring and challenging environment.

Mission
To ensure all students receive a world-class education that prepares them for success in college, career, and life.

Beliefs
We believe all students can learn given equitable opportunities. It is our responsibility to prepare students for the future and provide a safe and secure learning environment.

Personalized Learning Experiences

Objectives

Provide more active, personalized learning opportunities to support student readiness for middle school.

Critical Initiatives

- Invest in curriculum, materials aligned to/in support of instructional practices that promote personalized learning
- Provide professional development for personalized learning
- Implement personalized learning program to increase student engagement

Key Measures

- Materials inventories; curriculum distribution lists
- Teacher surveys
- Classroom observation
- Student engagement survey

Staff Stability

Objectives

Provide choice programs for professional development toward advanced certification programs to stabilize teaching staff.

Critical Initiatives

- Conduct leadership study group to establish needs and identify potential programs
- Reallocate human and fiscal resources to manage choice program and provide teacher support
- Develop and implement strategic partnership plan

Key Measures

- Participation rates for choice programs
- Completion rate for choice programs
- Staff surveys
- Teacher retention data

External Stakeholder Engagement

Objectives

Provide proactive communication and strategic involvement opportunities for parents and other community members.

Critical Initiatives

- Conduct audit of community engagement
- Develop and implement stakeholder engagement plan
- Develop and implement strategic partnership plan

Key Measures

- Communication record data
- Stakeholder surveys

Engaging Learning Environment

Objectives

Develop school environment where all students feel intellectually safe and have opportunities to succeed.

Critical Initiatives

- Conduct schoolwide diagnostic student interest and engagement
- Implement advisory block
- Redistribute counseling resources

Key Measures

- Student surveys
- Parent surveys
- Support staff inventories
- Student portfolios

Technology

Objectives

Provide appropriate and sufficient technology resources to students and teachers in all classrooms.
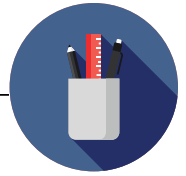
Critical Initiatives

- Revise school technology plan
- Conduct schoolwide needs assessment
- Identify and apply for external resource and partnership opportunities

Key Measures

- Technology needs assessment data
- Student observation ratings
- Student inventories
- Technology integration plans/artifacts

Source: Template image from Cognia Strategies application.

Subphase 4: Develop Annual Plan.

Complete the **Annual Improvement Plan Template**. This template is used to capture decisions about which strategic themes the institution will focus on during the coming year, as well as the accompanying information that clarifies strategic themes. There is no new information to generate to complete this subphase; the main task is to list the institution's focus for improvement for one year.
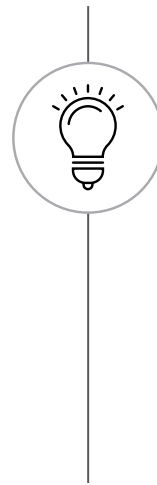
KEY TIPS

» **Remember a strategic theme can have more than one critical initiative.**

» **Transfer the information from the previous templates, and ensure everyone is in agreement with the institution's focus for the coming year.**

Annual Improvement Plan Template

INSTITUTION NAME:	TERM:	
Strategic Theme 1	Objective 1:	Key Measures:
	Critical Initiatives:	
Strategic Theme 2	Objective 2:	Key Measures:
	Critical Initiatives:	
Strategic Theme 3	Objective 3:	Key Measures:
	Critical Initiatives:	
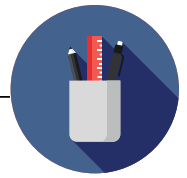
Example: Lincoln Elementary School

SCHOOL NAME: LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL		TERM: 2017–2018 SCHOOL YEAR
Strategic Theme 1 Personalized Learning Experiences	**Objective 1:** Provide more active, personalized learning opportunities to support student readiness for middle school.	**Key Measures:** • Materials: inventories, curriculum, distribution lists • Classroom observations
	Critical Initiatives: • Invest in curriculum materials aligned to/in support of instructional practices that promote personalized learning. • Provide professional development for personalized learning. • Implement personalized learning program to increase student engagement.	
Strategic Theme 2 Staff Stability	**Objective 2:** Provide choice programs for professional development toward advanced certification programs to stabilize teaching staff.	**Key Measures:** • Participation rates for choice programs • Completion rate for choice programs • Staff surveys • Teacher retention data
	Critical Initiatives: • Conduct leadership study group to identify programs. • Reallocate human and fiscal resources to manage programs and provide support. • Develop and/or purchase professional development curriculum.	
Strategic Theme 3 External Stakeholder Engagement	**Objective 3:** Provide proactive communication and strategic involvement opportunities for parents and other community members.	**Key Measures:** • Communication record data • Stakeholder surveys
	Critical Initiatives: • Conduct audit of community engagement. • Develop and implement stakeholder engagement plan. • Develop and implement strategic partnership plan.	

Note: This is an example and not all strategic themes are displayed.

The Planning Phase provides you the perfect opportunity to identify actions and measures, prioritize these actions, and communicate the information to stakeholders.

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTING

Purpose

The **Implementing Phase** converts plans into actions. Through engaging in this phase, the continuous improvement team determines concrete steps for making progress toward achieving objectives and critical initiatives. Success in this phase depends on regular monitoring and reporting updates to ensure execution of the plan. The work of Implementing can and should involve a degree of evaluation to determine whether the plan is proceeding as expected and producing acceptable results. This also will inform course corrections when needed.

The three subphases of Implementing are featured in the Overview of Implementing Phase.

"Ideas are easy. Implementation is hard."
– Guy Kawasaki

Overview of Implementing Phase

SUBPHASE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	WHAT TO DO	WHY IT IS IMPORTANT
Design Implementation Plan	What steps are involved in executing this critical initiative? How long should this take? How will each activity be measured? What will be the target for progress?	Break down critical initiatives into actionable activities. Determine a timeline for completion of tasks. Establish **activity measures** along with targets for improvement.	Divides critical initiatives into smaller steps to provide clear direction and make work manageable.
Assign and communicate responsibilities	What are the individual/team benchmarks for this **target cycle**?	Determine specific stakeholder groups responsible for tasks and measures of success. Begin working toward completing activities at a pace appropriate for reaching targets.	Organizes tasks by stakeholder groups to ensure each person has a part to play and knows that part. Makes stakeholder responsibilities transparent and adds an important layer of mutual accountability.
Enact and monitor progress	Is the institution doing what it said it would do as planned? What progress is being made toward the targets? Do any targets need to be revised? Are there enough resources to continue as planned?	Collect progress data from stakeholder groups. Revisit the **Annual Implementation Plan** to make changes as necessary. Update any activities affected by the adjustments. Communicate all changes, with evidence-based rationale, to all stakeholders.	Monitors progress in a routine and regular manner and communicates progress and changes. Keeps stakeholders informed of the work that lies ahead.

SUBPHASE 1: DESIGN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN	
GUIDING QUESTIONS ▶ ▶ ▶	**ACTIONS**
What are the steps involved in executing this critical initiative?	• Break down critical initiatives into actionable activities.
How long should this take?	• Communicate plan to all stakeholders.
How will each activity be measured?	
What will be the target for progress?	

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Develops Annual Implementation Plan by identifying activities necessary for carrying out the Annual Improvement Plan.* Objectives and critical initiatives are too high-level when it comes to actually doing the work required to implement the plan. This work is important to ensure the involvement and buy-in of the institution's staff members and to create digestible actions or activities for each critical initiative.

2. *Determines activity measures that signal success.* Now that activities are determined, it is essential for their success to clearly describe progress measurement for each activity. These activity measures answer the question, "What will we look to when we assess progress?" You might consider reviewing the collection of information or data (see Envisioning Phase, Information That Matters Template for an example) to list the various types of resources used by the institution. A professional

development digital portfolio is an example of what might be measured.

3. *Defines a target cycle.* Break the work up into regular, manageable time periods throughout the year. This way, stakeholders are less prone to becoming overwhelmed by the work. Further, it allows for identifying potential issues before it is too late to make changes. Be sure to include a launch date for each activity so the **Progress Monitor** can track the timing of multiple events that may be occurring during different target cycles or times of the year.

4. *Shares and discusses Annual Implementation Plan with stakeholders.* Successful implementation requires clear communication to all staff members on the overall plan, as well as each individual's role in implementing activities. You should frequently, and in a variety of settings, discuss the Annual Implementation Plan and its progress with stakeholders through the institution's communication resources.

5. *Oversees stakeholder groups as they review, clarify, and learn responsibilities outlined in the Annual Implementation Plan*. The Implementation Plan represents the body of work required to execute the critical initiatives for the entire institution. The scope of work can be carried out only through the involvement of all individual stakeholders. It is imperative each group and individual understands his or her role and responsibilities.

Resources for this Subphase:

- Annual Implementation Plan Template

- Annual Improvement Plan Template (optional)

SUBPHASE 2: ASSIGN AND COMMUNICATE RESPONSIBILITIES	
GUIDING QUESTIONS ▶ ▶ ▶	ACTIONS
What should individuals/teams be doing or working on now?	• Execute previously identified tasks/activities.
What are the individual/team benchmarks for this target cycle?	

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Assigns activities by stakeholder groups and organizes them on Progress Monitor and group-level Stakeholder Responsibility Cards (see the templates).* Not all stakeholders need access to the entire Annual Implementation Plan; however, you need to keep stakeholders informed of the progress as the activities roll out. **Progress Monitor Cards** ensure all actions are monitored by at least one person (internal staff member). You also will need to determine what activities should be implemented by specific stakeholder groups. By organizing these activities on Stakeholder Responsibility Cards, you can provide stakeholders a more concise and focused overview of their assigned activities. Stakeholder Responsibility Cards allow individuals to guide their actions and work toward benchmarks with fidelity.

2. *Ensures the resources identified for tasks are available for stakeholders to use.* All educators know the best plans and activities run the risk of being unsuccessful if the resources are unavailable. To reduce the risk of this happening, you should be realistic about the availability of resources and the

institution's budget. However, if the resources are listed for each activity and determined to be realistic and accessible, it is your responsibility to provide the resources and assist staff members with their use. For example, if institution leadership established the expectation that department heads attend one professional development conference per year, then those resources should be made available to the department heads.

3. *Checks with stakeholder groups to make sure they are keeping track of their own progress.* As a target cycle concludes, stakeholders will need to provide updates to their respective Progress Monitors. By tracking individual progress in an ongoing fashion, stakeholders can help limit the work of Progress Monitors. Some stakeholder groups may need more encouragement than others to fulfill this responsibility.

Resources for this Subphase:

- Annual Implementation Plan Template

- Progress Monitor Card Template

- Stakeholder Responsibility Card Template

SUBPHASE 3: ENACT AND MONITOR PROGRESS	
GUIDING QUESTIONS ▶ ▶ ▶	**ACTIONS**
Is the institution doing what it said it would do as planned?	• Assess and report progress made during a target cycle.
What progress is being made toward the targets?	
Do any targets or actions need to be revised?	
Are there enough resources to continue as planned?	

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Reviews Progress Monitor Cards to discuss progress and determine whether changes are needed.* Despite careful thought and good intentions, some approaches may need to be adjusted based on what the Progress Monitor reports. This review and feedback are best received if presented as supportive and collaborative. First, listen to the Progress Monitor to determine if the work related to the activity is not progressing or the benchmarks are not being met. A good practice is to establish a peer review atmosphere where two Progress Monitors are teamed together to discuss similar activities. This helps keep everyone on track.

2. *Revisits the Annual Improvement Plan (if changes are needed).* In some cases, a lack of progress may be the result of overly ambitious or optimistic objectives. In other instances, unforeseen challenges may have arisen that need to be addressed before the entire year passes. In either situation, you should formally amend the Annual Improvement Plan to reflect the new circumstances. Other tasks also should be addressed:

   i. Update Annual Implementation Plan to reflect changes to the Annual Improvement Plan.

   ii. Update Progress Monitor Cards to reflect new target cycle and any changes to the Annual Implementation Plan.

   iii. Update Stakeholder Responsibility Cards to reflect any changes to the Annual Implementation Plan.

   iv. Communicate changes to all stakeholder groups.

3. *Updates the theory of action when new influential factors emerge.* During any school year, it is possible for the unexpected to happen. For instance, a new law might be enacted impacting the planned funding source for a critical initiative. When these instances occur, be sure to record them on the Theory of Action Template so you remember to consider their influence when the time comes to evaluate.

....

Resources for this Subphase:

- Annual Improvement Plan Template

- Annual Implementation Plan Template

- Stakeholder Responsibility Card Template

Theory of Action: Implementing

A thoughtfully crafted **theory of action** will help an institution by providing an explicit model explaining how the institution's plans should lead to desired results. A well-constructed theory of action also serves as a tool for evaluation while work is in progress and upon completion. During the Implementing Phase, you identified the resources required for enacting the activities associated with each critical initiative. These items will appear on every theory of action the institution creates, serving as reminder that faithful implementation of critical initiatives depends upon having the appropriate required resources.

Note: If you have been entering your information in Strategies, the information entered is automatically populated.

THEORY OF ACTION BY PHASE	
IMPLEMENTING	Input
	• Resources
	Output
	• Populates the Theory of Action Template

Implementing Phase Templates

Subphase 1: Design Implementation Plan.

Complete and **use** the **Annual Implementation Plan Template** to break down objectives and critical initiatives into actionable activities necessary for assessing progress and/or making adjustments. Target cycles help stakeholders divide potentially overwhelming activities into more manageable segments.

KEY TIPS

» Seek input from staff members when developing activities and launch dates.

» Determine launch and check-in dates based on the institution's calendar and major events.

» Communicate regularly with staff members about the team's progress in developing the Annual Implementation Plan.

Annual Implementation Plan Template

ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN							
OBJECTIVE 1:			STRATEGIC THEME:				
Critical Initiative	Activities	Required Financial Resources	Activity Measure(s)	Launch Date	Targets		
					Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

Note: This is an example and not all critical initiatives are displayed.

ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN							
OBJECTIVE 1: Provide more active, personalized learning opportunities to support student readiness for middle school.			STRATEGIC THEME: Personalized Learning Experiences				
Critical Initiative	Activities	Required Financial Resources	Activity Measure(s)	Launch Date	Targets		
					30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
1.1 – Provide professional development for personalized learning	1.1a Collect data regarding teachers' current knowledge of/familiarity with personalized learning strategies	N/A	Classroom observations, Teacher self-assessment surveys, Professional learning credits (PLC) minutes	First survey completed during pre-planning, August 8	100% of classrooms observed 100% of teachers completing survey	20% of classrooms observed a second time	
	1.1b – Identify and engage in professional development opportunities	$1,000 for online professional learning enrollment fees	Professional development digital portfolios	August 16	20% of teachers reviewing at least one personalized learning professional development session	50% of teachers reviewing at least one personalized learning professional learning session	100% of teachers reviewing at least one professional development session 20% of teachers reviewing two personalized learning professional development sessions

Subphase 2: Assign and Communicate Responsibilities.

Complete and **use** the **Stakeholder Responsibility Card Template** to communicate the actions for which stakeholder groups will be responsible and document activities from the Annual Implementation Plan. Include measures of success to assess progress toward the end-of-year target. Keep in mind, while the language of objectives and critical initiatives will not change from the Strategy Map, activities should be worded to describe the work of the particular stakeholder connected to that critical initiative.

KEY TIPS

» **Consider asking staff members not in leadership roles to be responsible for an activity. Develop leaders when possible.**

» **Ensure all stakeholders understand their roles.**

» **Regularly communicate expectations and offer assistance so the institution achieves its objectives.**

Stakeholder Responsibility Card Template

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITY CARD				
OBJECTIVE	CRITICAL INITIATIVE	ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES MEASURES	TARGETS

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

Note: This is an example and not all critical initiatives are displayed.

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITY CARD				
OBJECTIVE	CRITICAL INITIATIVE	ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES MEASURES	TARGETS
Provide more active, personalized learning opportunities to support student readiness for middle school.	1.1 – Provide professional development for personalized learning.	Complete surveys and self-assessments.	Survey and self-assessment reports	Completed by end of first month
		Attend professional development sessions related to active learning.	Sign-in verification and reflection responses for digital portfolios	Three hours of related professional development by end of first term, 200-word reflection for each session

Subphase 3: Enact and Monitor Progress.

Complete and **use** the **Progress Monitor Card Template** to track progress made toward completing activities and reaching short-term goals identified for each target cycle in the Annual Implementation Plan. Also, identify the stakeholder(s) responsible for overseeing individual activities, as well as resources required for successful implementation. Be sure to fill in the current target cycle (e.g., first quarter) and include important due dates or checkpoints that occur during the current target cycle in the **Benchmarks** column.

KEY TIPS

» Use the Annual Implementation Plan to fill in the Progress Monitor Card.

» Ensure each Progress Monitor is accountable for collecting the information for each target cycle.

» Establish strong communication processes between the Progress Monitors and the Continuous Improvement Team.

» Continue to monitor progress in advance of target cycles.

Progress Monitor Card Template

OBJECTIVE 1, CRITICAL INITIATIVE 1.1							
PROGRESS MONITOR				TARGET CYCLE			
(Critical Initiative)							
Activity	Launch Date	Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed	Current Target	Benchmarks		Status/Notes

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

Note: This is an example and not all critical initiatives are displayed.

OBJECTIVE 1, CRITICAL INITIATIVE 1.1											
PROGRESS MONITOR: Al Collins, Instructional Coach				TARGET CYCLE		**30**	**60**	**90**	**120**	**150**	**180**
1.1–Provide professional development for personalized learning.											
Activity	Launch Date	Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed	Current Target	Benchmarks			Status/Notes			
1.1a – Collect data regarding teachers' current knowledge of/ familiarity with personalized learning strategies.	August 8	Administration instructional coach	Observation forms	80% of classrooms observed	Kindergarten & First Grade: August 10 Second Grade: August 12 Third Grade: August 13 Fourth Grade: August 15 Fifth Grade: August 16						
1.1b – Identify and engage in professional development opportunities.	August 15	Classroom teachers; Grade level teacher leaders	Registration lists for teacher professional development enrollment	20% of teachers reviewing at least one personalized learning professional development session	Enrolled in first session by August 30						

The **Implementing Phase** turns your plans into actions to ensure you are getting the intended results.

PHASE 4: EVALUATING

Purpose

The **Evaluating Phase** guides the continuous improvement team to use the knowledge, ideas, and questions gathered from the previous phases (or other prior work) to answer important questions identified throughout the process. The Evaluating Phase is intended to help organize pertinent information needed to make a judgment related to the significance, effectiveness, or quality of a given critical initiative. Managing the ever-increasing amount of information about the learning process requires a clear understanding of the ever-changing link between the data being collected and the questions being asked throughout the lifecycle of the continuous improvement process. In the Evaluating Phase, the continuous improvement team examines the congruence between what was expected to happen and what actually happened. The three subphases of Evaluating are featured in the Overview of Evaluating Phase.

"One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intent rather than their results."

– Milton Friedman

Overview of Evaluating Phase

SUBPHASES	GUIDING QUESTIONS	WHAT TO DO	WHY IT IS IMPORTANT
Determine impact of critical initiatives	What existing issues/practices/conditions were problematic? What, if anything, has changed? Did the outcomes data indicate success? Was the proposed solution executed as planned? Are there other explanations (beyond the intervention) that might explain the results?	Compare outcomes to starting points. Determine whether outcomes indicated positive results. Verify the critical initiative was carried out with fidelity. Explore alternative explanations.	Provides the basis for evaluating success. Ensures any positive outcomes can be attributed fairly to the plan that was proposed. Helps determine whether critical initiatives should be counted as a success, sustained for another year, revised, or abandoned altogether.
Judge success of Annual Plan	Do the outcomes tied to critical initiatives align to our overall plans? Did we make progress toward our objectives based on strategic themes?	Discuss findings from critical initiatives in relation to one another. Describe results in a holistic way.	Brings together multiple measures of success to provide a high-level analysis of the work of an entire school year.
Address implications for future work	How should this year's findings influence next year's plans?	Decide whether sufficient progress was made. Organize results to inform future planning.	Guides subsequent planning efforts.

SUBPHASE 1: DETERMINE IMPACT OF CRITICAL INITIATIVES

GUIDING QUESTIONS ▶▶▶	ACTIONS

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What existing issues/practices/conditions were problematic?

What, if anything, has changed?

Did the outcomes data indicate success?

Was the proposed solution executed as planned?

Are there other explanations (beyond the intervention) that might explain the results?

ACTIONS

- Examine outcomes in relation to inputs.
- Analyze findings to determine success of the critical initiatives.

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Displays pre- and post-data together, and compares outcomes to starting points to identify differences.* Evaluating the success of any critical initiative requires the comparison of baseline data to outcomes observed after implementation. Displaying these data together enables a side-by-side picture for review. Consider whether any variances are substantively different or only marginally changed.

2. *Determines whether outcomes, key measures, and activity measures indicated positive results of the critical initiative and related actions.* Before enacting the critical initiative, you identified key measures, along with intended outcomes, that would indicate success at the end of the year. Now, determine whether the summative data collected satisfy those conditions for success.

3. *Verifies the critical initiative was carried out with fidelity.* The review of the pre- and post-data may indicate changes that suggest the critical initiative was successful. Do not be too quick to attribute changes to the institution's planned work, though. First double-check to make sure the activities aligned to the critical initiative were carried out correctly.

4. *Discusses the role of influential factors that also might explain the results.* After verifying the critical initiative was implemented as planned, take more time to explore other influential factors that may have led to the outcomes. It may appear, based only on outcomes, that a critical initiative did not lead to expected results even though the plan of action was followed. For example, perhaps the instructional coach resigned in the middle of the year and his replacement was less familiar with the institution's new critical initiative regarding personalized learning. It is possible the critical initiative was appropriate, and it was implemented faithfully. It is also possible that the impact of the instructional coach's resignation outweighed the impact of the plan. If no such explanations appear to exist, you might conclude the critical initiative was a success.

Resource for this Subphase:

- Theory of Action Template

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">SUBPHASE 2: JUDGE THE SUCCESS OF THE ANNUAL PLAN</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">GUIDING QUESTIONS ▶ ▶ ▶</td><td align="center">ACTIONS</td></tr>
<tr><td>Do the outcomes tied to critical initiatives align to our overall plans?

Did we make progress toward our objectives based on strategic themes?</td><td>• Make recommendations for future work based on the successes and/or failures of the most recent year.</td></tr>
</table>

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Discusses the findings from the evaluation of individual critical initiatives in relation to one another.* In the previous subphase, you considered the effectiveness of critical initiatives one-by-one. The next level of analysis requires a consideration of how these critical initiatives may be connecting with one another. The questions that follow are similar to those you just used to evaluate each critical initiative but are expanded to allow you to consider the entire Annual Improvement Plan.

   a. *Is our now current reality different from our then current reality?* The current reality an institution investigated before last year is not necessarily its new current reality. At least, it should not be if the plan worked. Use the data the institution has collected throughout the year to compare where it was then to where it is now.

   b. *Are these differences what the institution expected to see?* The Annual Improvement Plan was intended to generate change. Did the changes bring the institution closer to its long-term objectives? Refer to the key measures the institution identified to help with this decision.

   c. *Did the institution faithfully execute the Annual Improvement Plan as written?* The Annual Improvement Plan the institution created likely contains more than one critical initiative. If one or more of them was not implemented in the way it was intended, this should influence how you view the overall success of the Annual Improvement Plan.

   d. *Are there alternative explanations for success or failure?* Certain circumstances can influence individual critical initiatives. Consider the example of the instructional coach who suddenly resigns.

This might contribute to less than expected effects tied to the personalized learning critical initiative while having no effect on other critical initiatives. Some factors, however, might cause larger-scale disruptions. Severe weather, for example, might leave a school closed for weeks at a time, no doubt disrupting work among many (if not all) of the critical initiatives.

2. *Describes the combined results of the critical initiatives in a holistic way that speaks to the effectiveness of the Annual Improvement Plan.* The prior steps call for a thorough exploration of outcomes at multiple levels. Based on those conversations, write a summary of the findings regarding the effectiveness of the Annual Improvement Plan. How did the work related to the critical initiatives connect to any progress (or lack thereof) toward achieving long-term objectives?

SUBPHASE 3: ADDRESS THE IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK		
GUIDING QUESTIONS	▶ ▶ ▶	ACTIONS
How should this year's findings influence next year's plans?		• Consider how work guided by the Annual Improvement Plan connects to the long-term objectives of the institution.

What Happens/What to Do

The Continuous Improvement Team:

1. *Decides whether sufficient progress was made toward completing critical initiatives and meeting objectives.* A review of the institution's accomplishments could uncover a variety of findings. In some cases, a critical initiative might have been executed perfectly, leading to the desired and predicted outcomes. In other instances, problems may have arisen that contributed to a lack of results. Before moving on to making plans for the next year, determine which critical initiative(s) can be retired, revised, and/or abandoned.

2. *Organizes results in a way that informs future planning.* In many cases, you will begin planning for the subsequent year immediately after evaluating the work of the prior year. As such, it is important you thoughtfully summarize your findings, so they can be incorporated easily into the planning work for the upcoming year.

Evaluating Phase Template

Subphase 1: Determine Impact of Critical Initiatives.

Complete and **use** the **Theory of Action Template** to create a visual representation of the institution's theory of action. If you have gone through the Strategies process, most of the parts of this template already should be completed, and you should check what was entered for accuracy.

KEY TIPS

» Keep in mind that Strategies will input only financial resources. All other resources need to be input manually.

» Involve stakeholders who were decision-makers or had responsibilities for the plan's execution to ensure they know the impact of their contributions.

Theory of Action Template

Assumptions:

Influential Factors:

Mission

Resources

Critical Initiative

Key Measures

Intended Outcomes

Objective

Vision

Source: Template image from Strategies application.

Example: Lincoln Elementary School

Assumptions:

• Professional development is an effective approach to improving teacher behaviors.

• Teachers will gain new skills.

Influential Factors:

• Effectiveness/quality of teacher training

Mission

To ensure that all students receive a world class education that prepares them for success in college, career and life.

Resources

• $1,000 for online PD enrollment fees

Critical Initiative

Provide professional development for integrating personalized learning.

Key Measures

• Materials inventories; curriculum distribution lists
• Classroom observations

Intended Outcomes

• All staff will gain knowledge necessary to transition into personalized learning instruction.

Objective

Provide more active, personalized learning opportunities to support student readiness for middle school.

Vision

Every student achieving at his or her maximum potential in an engaging, inspiring, and challenging environment.

Source: Template image from Strategies application.

Engaging in the **Evaluating Phase** helps you organize pertinent information needed to make judgments about any given critical initiative and allows the examination of what was expected to happen and what actually happened.

Conclusion

It is the duty of educators to constantly strive to improve their institution, educational practices, and learning environments. From early learning to K–12, public to nonpublic, digital to postsecondary and everything in between, it is an educator's responsibility to make education better today than yesterday and still to do even better tomorrow. This ongoing quest to be and do better is the essence of continuous improvement. With so much on the line, how can educators approach this immense responsibility? Cognia's Strategic Thinking and Improvement Planning process, which is embedded throughout Strategies, serves as a guide to assist educators with their continuous improvement goals, planning, and implementation. *inFocus: A Guide for Strategic Thinking and Improvement Planning* outlines Cognia's research-based approach to sustained continuous improvement that complements the Strategies application.

Planning and carrying out the improvement work required during a school year is clearly no small feat. We hope you find this resource to be an empowering tool for guiding and assessing your efforts along your continuous improvement journey.

Glossary of Key Terms

Activity/Activities – an action that provides more specific information on how the critical initiative will be approached or implemented.

Activity Measure – a source of data used to evaluate the effectiveness of activities in completing the work of critical initiatives.

Annual Implementation Plan – a detailed yearly improvement plan that provides staff members with clear direction on the activities, financial resources, activity measures, launch dates, and target dates to execute the plan.

Annual Improvement Plan – a summary of an institution's short-term or immediate focus for the coming year that features its strategic themes, objectives, critical initiatives, and key measures.

Assumptions – the underlying beliefs or rationale for the intended outcomes, critical initiatives, and/or expectations for overall success; these beliefs will be considered accurate or questioned depending on the results of the intended outcomes.

Beliefs – the core values that help define the identity and culture of an institution.

Critical Initiative – an evidence-based method used to guide the implementation of actions required to achieve objectives (sometimes referred to as a strategy).

Current Reality – an analysis of information and data to determine a comprehensive status of an institution at a given point in time.

Disruptors – something that causes or prevents processes, practices, or events from continuing in their current state; something that causes change in the way people function, operate, and/or think.

Future Trends – the process of analyzing patterns, disruptors, and changes from a variety of disciplines to develop insights and understand their impact on the institution in the years ahead.

Improvement Journey – a research-based, ongoing process in which institutions engage for the purpose of increasing overall effectiveness and making positive, measurable impacts on all stakeholders, primarily students, by focusing on and implementing three essential elements: learn and share, examine and plan, and act and evaluate.

Influential Factors – anything outside an institution's control or sphere of influence that could positively or negatively impact the institution's direction toward improvement.

Input – resources, programs, people, etc., currently in place to achieve the institution's critical initiatives.

Intended Outcomes – the results an institution expects as a consequence of undertaking a critical initiative and its key measures.

Key Measure – a source of data used to evaluate the effectiveness of critical initiatives in reaching short-term (annual) improvement goals.

Mission – a statement that defines an institution's purpose or reason for existing.

Objective – statement representing intended outcomes of long-term direction; featured on the Strategy Map (sometimes referred to as goals).

Output – initiatives, activities, and/or services implemented or produced.

Priority/Priority Statement – a statement developed by the continuous improvement team that represents the connections and gaps between the current reality and the future priorities developed in the Envisioning Phase.

Progress Monitor – the individual on the continuous improvement team who is responsible for aggregating data regarding progress made toward the goal/target.

Progress Monitor Card – a stakeholder resource that visually represents expectations of individuals and measures to be examined.

Stakeholder Responsibility Card – a resource used by individual staff members to track both his/her progress toward implementing activities and meeting activity measures and targets.

Strategy Map – a tool used to communicate an institution's long-term improvement plan that features long-term objectives, critical initiatives, key metrics, vision, mission, and beliefs.

Strategic Theme – a theme developed from the priority statement.

Target Cycle – an interval of time determined by the institution's continuous improvement team to review measures from the Implementation Plan.

Vision – the aspirational destination the institution wants to reach over the long-term.

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