

Smart Beginnings Strategic Planning Template

Your strategic plan should be centered on your action plan, but it is also helpful to include other information so when people pick it up they understand its purpose and how it was developed. The following are sections you may want to include.

SECTION A: Introduction

This section should be very brief and describe why the document was produced and how it will be used. The following is an example of the type of information you want to include in the introduction.

This strategic plan was developed by the [INSERT YOUR COALITION'S NAME] Smart Beginnings Coalition. Under Smart Beginnings, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation provides support to local partnerships working to coordinate, improve, and expand the delivery of high-quality early childhood programs and services. Our coalition is one of 24 local or regional initiatives across Virginia. The mission of our Smart Beginnings coalition is [insert mission]. This plan is based on a community assessment that collected key data on young children and obtained input from a wide variety of stakeholders who are involved with issues related to young children ages 0–5. This plan is intended to guide the future work of the Smart Beginnings coalition and to serve as a resource for all of those seeking to make improvements in how our community helps support young children.

SECTION B: Why Focus on Early Childhood?

Not everyone who reads your strategic plan will be aware of the importance of focusing on young children. You want to let them know why this is an important issue. South Hampton Roads Smart Beginnings Action Plan narratives (which can be viewed at: http://smartbeginningsshr.org/index.php?/sub-comm/action_plans/) include extensive detail on the reasons that it is important to focus on very young children. You can certainly provide more detail if you think it will be useful, but at the very least a few well chosen quotes and references can help convince the audience for your community assessment that early childhood is an important topic about which they should be concerned. The key message is that a growing body of evidence shows that investment in very young children pays off for those children and for society as a whole.

Some examples of useful quotes are listed below:

“It’s very unusual for us to be commenting on a social policy issue because we maintain our independence in our nonpartisan institution. On many issues, economic research is not decisive. On some issues though, economic research sends a very clear message. Research shows us that early childhood development sends a return to the individual and to society. We see it as an economic growth strategy...Any one of us would be very happy to have these rates of return on investments that we’re making ... Some of the return goes directly to the individual ... but a substantial share of the return is the broader social benefit, the public benefit.”

Sally Green, First Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond

"Startling statistics released by the Pentagon show that 75 percent of young people ages 17 to 24 are currently unable to enlist in the United States military. Three of the most common barriers for potential recruits are failure to graduate high school, a criminal record, and physical fitness issues, including obesity. ... The most proven investment for kids who need help graduating from high school starts early: high-quality early education. It also helps kids stay away from crime and succeed in life."

Mission: Readiness Military Leaders for Kids. An organization of senior retired military leaders including multiple generals, admirals, lieutenant generals, major generals, rear admirals, and brigadier generals. www.missionreadiness.org

"Early childhood development programs are rarely portrayed as economic development initiatives, and we think that is a mistake. Such programs, if they appear at all, are at the bottom of the economic development lists for state and local governments. They should be at the top. ... Studies find that well-focused investments in early childhood development yield high public as well as private returns. ... The return on investment from early childhood development is extraordinary, resulting in better working public schools, more educated workers and less crime."

Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

"Early interventions for disadvantaged children promote schooling, raise the quality of the workforce, enhance the productivity of schools and reduce crime, teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency. They raise earnings and promote social attachment. Focusing solely on earnings gains, returns to dollars invested are as high as 15-17%."

Nobel Prize Winning Economist James Heckman

"Direct evidence has been growing that all children can benefit from high-quality preschool, including the more economically advantaged."

National Institute for Early Education Research

"Research has demonstrated that early detection of developmental disabilities and appropriate intervention can significantly improve functioning and reduce the need for lifelong interventions."

"However, less than 50% of these children (meaning those with developmental disabilities) are identified as having a problem before starting school, by which time significant delays may have already occurred and opportunities for treatment have been missed."

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

If you are looking for additional information or want help thinking about ways to convey the importance of early childhood and the work you are doing, refer to *Seven Things Policymakers Need to Know About School Readiness* which was developed by the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network and is available at: <http://finebynine.org/uploaded/file/7%20Things.pdf>. It is helpful for thinking about the messages that work best with people who do not work directly with children or in the social services field.

SECTION C: A Summary of Key Community Assessment Findings

You should provide a brief summary of community assessment findings, particularly highlighting those findings that were used in developing the action plan. This might include highlighting a few of the “getting ready” indicators and some of the environmental scan findings. You should note how these findings helped influence the development of your action plan. This does not have to be very long; you can always refer people to the community assessment report for more information. The purpose of this section is to convey to the reader the thinking behind your plan. It is your opportunity to explain to the reader the reasons your coalition has chosen the goals and strategies that follow.

SECTION D: An Action Plan for Moving Forward

The action plan is the heart of your strategic plan. It tells the reader what your coalition is going to do next. You should include both a narrative and a table showing what actions you are planning on taking. The section should include the following:

- **A very brief summary of how the action plan was developed.** This could cover the role of the leadership council and coalition along with any meetings you held to get feedback from other stakeholders.
- **Highlights of the action plan.** You should provide some brief highlights of the action plan. One way to do this is to organize it by the goals you have chosen with a few details regarding the strategies you are suggesting the community pursue.
- **The completed action planning template.** This template, the **activities and outcomes form for planning and reporting** (appendix C), is included as part of your toolkit. The template includes your general goals, the strategies you will use to try to reach the goals, and the action steps that will need to be taken to carry out those strategies as well as the outcomes you are trying to achieve.

SECTION E: Next Steps

This can be a very brief section covering the next steps, including applying for future funding from VECF. You should also talk about the need for community members and key stakeholders to get involved with SB and how they might be able to do that. Either here or somewhere in the document there should be contact information for the coordinator and possibly other leaders.