

ARCA Standard – Regional Center Strategic Thinking

Focus Area and Scope of this Standard

- This standard addresses the use of strategic thinking within each regional center focus resources (staff, board and community partnerships) to maximize the performance and quality outcomes each center provides to its community.
- This standard does not address the specific procedures related to methods of strategic thinking a regional center might utilize.

Definitions of Words Used in this Standard

1. **Strategic Thinking:** *strategic thinking involves intentional thought process shared by a group of people which incorporates foresight, anticipation of future events, alignment of existing requirements and current trend analysis, to position the organization for long term success.*
2. **Strategic Plan:** *a roadmap identified through an organization's strategic thinking and used by an organization to establish goals and objectives with timelines and measures. The strategic planning process additionally takes into account external forces including social, economic, political and cultural pressures and align with the agency's internal resources, competencies, advantages and positions, to assure the most likely positive outcome and success of the organization in meeting its goals.*
3. **Responsibilities:** *areas of duty, obligation or assignment for which you have both the skill and the authority to carry out.*
4. **Competencies:** *Sufficient knowledge and skill in a subject or topic area such that you are identified as able to exercise the knowledge and skill at will and when needed. Being seen as an expert in a specific topic or subject such that others can rely on your advice and recommendations.*

Background/Why this is Important

- Regional Centers must operate under the guidelines established by the Lanterman Act and their contracts with the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS), and Directives issued by DDS
- In recent years, the regional center system has grown rapidly in population served, amount of funds managed, the complexity of operations as required through both statute and regulations, and in the extent of community expectations. These decisive external pressures create significant impact on the operations of the regional center, including the expectations of its community, the data needed for reporting on the changes, its budgeting procedures and the knowledge and skills required of its workforce. Some changes occur quickly and require agile

technology systems, all of which require effective strategic thinking/planning to anticipate regional centers' needs for the near term and the long-term future.

- Some regional centers desire to demonstrate a higher level of performance by engaging with their communities, their staff members and other interested parties in strategic thinking and expanding that effort into a formal strategic planning process. Regional centers engaging in strategic thinking and planning anticipate these efforts will benefit the agency through increased commitment to their mission, improved engagement in the agency's goals and increased unity across all parties.
- DDS directives affect tactical and operational activities on a day-to-day basis, however, the overall framework for strategic thinking/planning within regional centers emphasizes the alignment between adherence to the Lanterman Act, a commitment to stakeholder collaboration, responsiveness to legislative requirements and the commitment to a continuous desire to improve practices and services.

Standard

- Collectively, regional center leadership (The Board of Directors and Executive Director) serves as the public face of the organization in its interactions with the general community, community partners, policymakers, and the media. In addition, the regional center leadership is responsible for guiding and directing the overall strategy executed by regional center staff, including the executive Director and additional executive level staff members.
- For regional center leadership to effectively accomplish the mission of the Regional Center, periodic planning activities should be grounded in the regional center's mission vision and guiding values, reflecting a commitment to the people served by the regional center, and utilizing deliberate strategic thinking.
- Regional center boards and Executive Directors have distinct roles, responsibilities, and authority however they also share responsibility for leading the regional center. The board and leadership share a vision of the organization and demonstrate their cooperative actions in the best interest of the individuals served. By coming together to engage in strategic thinking as defined above, board members and senior leadership intentionally discuss alignment of existing requirements, consider community input gained from public meetings, analyze trends in their data, and consider future anticipated changes in state policy or regulations. Regional centers should experience this strategic thinking as a unifying opportunity for the board of directors, the executive leadership team, and the community served.
- Organizations that want to reach a higher standard of performance expand their strategic thinking into intentional strategic planning by setting goals and objectives, establishing measures and identifying timeframes and data sources for the regional center to demonstrate specific levels of performance.
- As such, it is appropriate that both the Board of Directors, members of the leadership team, and key personnel at the regional center participate in the strategic thinking and/or planning development and the implementation process.
- Implementation of actions identified through either strategic thinking or planning requires periodic review procedures to ensure the actions taken and decisions made remain relevant and addresses the regional center's obligation to be responsive to its community's needs.
- Regional centers choosing to move from strategic thinking to formal strategic planning will need to ensure a comprehensive process, by considering input from additional stakeholders including people served by the agency, their family members, and service providers. Such input may derive from feedback received during required public meetings and supplemented with other

forms of input such as individual and family surveys, additional listening sessions or community input methods.

- Effective planning will include setting of goals and objectives based on the priorities identified in during strategic planning discussions. Such priorities will assist the regional center leadership with guidance for future decisions and resource allocation for the duration of the strategic plan time horizon. Based on the prioritized goals and objectives, the plan should include measures for determining progress and the data source for the measures. The overall aim will be to improve the effectiveness of regional center services and ensure access to services necessary to meet the needs of people enrolled in the regional center. Periodic review and reporting mechanisms are an essential part of the strategic plan and provide a means to ensure its implementation.

Related Legal Requirements

Welfare and Institution Code contains no direct reference to strategic planning requirements for regional centers.

Indicators of Performance: Examples of Strategic Plans

[Harbor Regional Center Strategic Plan](#) Includes a description of the process used to develop the strategic plan

[San Gabriel/Pomona Regional Center Strategic Plan](#) Example of a plan written in plain language, and links to quarterly updates to the strategic plan

[Regional Center of the East Bay](#) Examples of Case Management Satisfaction goals and objectives, and improving person centered planning goals and objectives; alignment with regional center performance measures and existing performance contract.

[Tri-Counties Regional Center Strategic Plan](#) Easy to read and includes section on required performance standards and reporting (Performance Contract measures and financial measures reported to DDS)

Resources Available

ARCA leadership is in the process of identifying reliable consultants for assistance with Strategic Thinking and Planning. For more information, regional centers are encouraged to contact Tony Anderson or Amy Westling for assistance.

[Baldrige Strategy Development](#)

[Interactive Strategic Planning for your Business](#)

[Article on Strategy Development vs. Strategic Planning](#)

Date Adopted by ARCA Board of Directors: October 17, 2025