Step 5: Developing and Implementing an Action Plan

See PSAM in action: Philadelphia: http://www.fhi360.org/projects/postsecondary-success-collaborative-philadelphia

Once the team has discussed strengths and opportunities, determined priorities, and has a shared understanding and vision for preparing all students for college and career, it is time to write the action plan!

What is an Action Plan?

An action plan is a way to make sure the vision and work the PSAM team has done is made concrete. An action plan consists of the action steps that will lead to the changes you have determined are important for the college and career readiness of all your students.

Each priority should include the following information:

- **Action Step**— what steps will achieve the desired change or improvement?
- **Who** will lead the effort?
- **What resources** (i.e., money, staff, partners) are needed? Who are the partners and what can they do?
- **By when**— what is the time frame in which you want to see this steps complete or change occur?
- **Communication**— who should know what and by when?
- **Challenges and Obstacles**— what are they and can they be overcome?

Why do an Action Plan?

The PSAM team has invested many hours working on understanding what the school can do to begin improving the preparation of students for college and career. The purpose of the Action Plan is to:

- Communicate to members of the school and community that you are committed to making this a priority in the school
- Be sure no details get overlook
- Document and articulate exactly what is essential to do and by when—and be able to make changes as needed along the way
- Build accountability into the PSAM team's work. A written plan with clear lines of responsibility, increases the chances that people will follow through.

RESOURCES

Agenda: Identify Priorities and Develop an Action Plan

PSAM Action Plan Worksheet

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What are the criteria for a good action plan?

The action plan for your priorities should meet several criteria.

- It should be **complete**. Does it list all the action steps or changes to be sought in all relevant parts of the school community (e.g., schools, local businesses, university partners? local education funds, community based organizations)?
- **It should be clear**. Is it apparent who will do what by when and with what resources?
- **It should be current**. The action plan is a living document and should be changed as needed. Does it anticipate newly emerging opportunities and barriers? Is there flexibility in the action plan in the event of unforeseen changes?

How to write the action plan

The PSAM team will have gathered a lot of information, identified important sources of data, and engaged the support of partners and other stakeholders in the school community. Now is the time for all of the work to be synthesized and used to inform the specific steps the team will take and delegate to realize change and make the work a reality.

Make sure the team has the following documents to develop the plan:

- PSAM Action Plan Worksheet
- List of priorities that the team agreed upon
- Any additional information and ideas saved throughout the analysis and discussion phase that might help with the action plan
- Any additional data that will be important to defining the action plans.

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Turn priorities into action steps

The priorities need to be translated into action step with clear timelines and lines of responsibilities. For example, you may have a priority to start college and career awareness activities in the 9th grade. Your action steps need to be specific, so two action steps for this priority might be: 1) Develop a 9th grade orientation class that includes lessons and activities on getting ready for college; and 2) Plan an annual 9th grade college trip.

Sample of Action plan with priority and action steps

Priority 1: Start college and career awareness activities in the 9th grade					
Action Steps	**Who?**	**Resources Needed, including outside partners**	**Time Frame (by when)**	**Communication (e.g., weekly email updates)**	**Challenges (to keep in mind &/or address)**
1) Develop 9th grade orientation that includes lessons and activities for raising student awareness of college and careers.	Mr. J	Partner: Student Success Center Other staff: college counselor Materials: college inquiry resources and career inventories	End of spring or summer in time to implement next fall	All 9th grade teachers and staff (e.g., guidance counselor), students, and families,	Teachers may be resistant to working outside their subject area; additional PD may be required.
2) Plan at least one annual 9th grade trip to a local college tied to a writing assignment in ELA.	Ms. B	Travel money; chaperones	In time for a March or April visit	Same as above	Fitting into and already full 9th grade curriculum

Anticipate possible barriers to proposed action steps, and possible ways to address proactively

- Is there enough money to carry out our proposed action steps? (If not, are there any related grants to apply for?)
- Is there enough people power? (If not, can we recruit volunteers? parents? students?)
- Have we allocated enough time to carry out these changes?
- Can we excite staff and others about these action steps?
- What kind of opposition might be encountered? Are there ways to address it in a positive way that might help more people get on board?

Implement the Action Plan

Once the action plan is completed, it's time to put it into action! Here are some ways to help make sure the plan is moving along and stays on track.

- **Communicate the plan**
  - o Distribute the action plan in writing and electronically to all PSAM team members, with names attached to specific tasks. Additionally, this can be a great time to ask for feedback before the plan becomes "official."
  - o Make sure everyone who is involved knows what the group has done, and knows if they have any responsibilities to help carry out the plan.

- **Recognize the individuals** who are leading the work to the whole school community.
  - o The team will have put in a lot of time to reach this point and deserves recognition.

- **Keep track** of what and how well action steps are proceeding
  - o Send regular emails asking others how they are doing with their tasks. This should be a supportive correspondence, not a "compliance" email.
  - o Offer support including moral support ("how are you doing?") if the team member needs any other assistance.
  - o At regular PSAM team meetings ask members to report on the status of action steps. Consider making this a regular part of the meeting.

- **Celebrate the completion of action steps.**
  - o It's important that accomplishments (wins!) and the people who helped make them happen are recognized by the school community.

POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS ASSET MAPPING TOOLKIT

Next Steps

The PSAM process is successfully underway in your school! NOW WHAT? An important next step is to develop an ongoing plan for what role PSAM will have in annual school improvement. At the very least, schools will want to consider the following:

- **Follow up and monitor how the items in the action plan are progressing.**
  - It's a good idea to periodically reflect. These questions can be used informally between colleagues, and more formally through surveys and other evaluation methods.
  - Did the action step take significantly more resources and time than we anticipated?
  - Are their obstacles we didn't anticipate?
  - Are there unforeseen events that have either derailed the plan or opened up new opportunities?
  - Are there changes in the budget that have an impact on the plan? So some adjustments need to be made?
  - Did we do what we said we would do?
  - Are we doing it well? How do we know?
  - Is what we are doing advancing our goal to improve college and career readiness for our students? How do we know?

- **Celebrate and communicate successes** with the school and local community.
  - Publish your successes in a local newspaper or blog.
  - Share it with the school in a town meeting.
  - Let the PTA know.
  - Brag to the district.

- **Decide how often** the school will do PSAM.
  - Will you administer, collect, and analyze the data from the PSAM survey every year? Every two years? What seems right for your school? Will you keep the same team members to the greatest extent possible or will you keep a small core group and rotate in new members through each cycle?
  - How many priorities do you have and how long do you anticipate them taking to complete?
  - Do you want to complete the current set of priorities before developing a new set?
  - Do you want more data to revise the current set of priorities?

Tips for Success

- Be realistic about the priorities. What are three or four priorities the school can put in place within the time frame? Don't put too many items in your plan.
- Who are the other partners you can engage in this work? What resources can they bring to the table? What other supports in the community can you access?
- Think about this as the long term, ongoing work of the school for improving the college and career readiness of your students. This year you may decide to ramp up the 9th grade curriculum and FAFSA supports for the seniors. Next year it will be something different.
- Make sure someone is keeping the plans on track and that you are measuring the right outcomes.
- Revisit the plans and make adjustments as needed.

Conclusion

The information and tools in the PSAM toolkit are intended to support schools in (a) identifying its assets and needs in five key areas of preparing students for successful postsecondary pathways, (b) understanding how school policies and structures support or hinder work, and (c) creating meaningful changes and improvements that move the school towards effectively preparing ALL students.

Although local contexts are unique, to date, schools and districts that have had the most success with PSAM are those that have partnered with a technical assistance provider to effectively coordinate and facilitate PSAM. This is why we urge schools and districts to consider working with an experienced technical assistance provider with the skills and trust required to both coordinate the various partners and stakeholders who have a role to play in improving the postsecondary outcomes of young people and to facilitate the critical conversations that PSAM will generate.