

Workforce Planning and Organizational Readiness Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: Why did we develop a web-based Human Services Workforce Planning Portal?

A1: In conjunction with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, we developed the Workforce Planning Portal to provide human services agencies with easy access to the tools they need to help them address workforce challenges.

We believe there is a direct correlation between the quality of the frontline human services workforce and the effectiveness of the services this workforce delivers. Human services workforce concerns are gaining a more prominent place in discussions of the future of these fields. Agencies acknowledge that they cannot produce more successful child and family outcomes without addressing their workforce challenges, yet across the country they are struggling to find effective solutions.

The Workforce Planning (WFP) Portal can help human services organizations address some of these issues and challenges so that they can better achieve their mission for children and families. By placing user-friendly tools and information on the web, we hope to be of help to a wide range of organizations and to contribute to workforce thinking in the human services field.

Q2: Why stress comprehensive workforce planning?

A2: Human services workforce issues are very complex, and lasting solutions require comprehensive approaches. Effectively addressing workforce challenges is not about learning a new staff recruitment technique or increasing the availability of fringe benefits, although those and many other small changes can help. Rather, effectively addressing workforce issues requires a fundamental examination of the organization itself – what it hopes to accomplish, how it uses its employees, how it has changed and is changing over time, the status of its field, the challenge of competing job opportunities and, most importantly, how the development of a high quality workforce is related to the achievement of the organization's mission.

Effectively addressing workforce concerns may require a number of small steps and individual strategies, but no single strategy will suffice to address the full range of human services workforce needs. Therefore, we recommend that agencies approach these issues comprehensively – starting with the big picture and narrowing down to an array of achievable tasks.

Q3: Is workforce planning for us? Are there any indicators to help us determine how “ready” our organization is to begin Workforce Planning?

A3: There are a number of factors that can help determine an organization's readiness to implement Workforce Planning. Indications of organizational readiness include:

- Having a clearly articulated vision, mission and values embraced by all within the organization.

- Having a leadership team that recognizes the critical importance of creating a positive and supportive work environment and a commitment to Workforce Planning.
- Having workforce data.
- Agency recognition that change is a permanent condition – not a one-time event.
- Leadership’s recognition that employees are an asset and part of the solution to the challenges facing the agency.

Q4: Is the Workforce Planning approach suitable for all agencies?

A4: Yes. Workforce Planning can help the full spectrum of human services organizations – in both public and private sectors. We designed the content of the portal to be applicable to any type of human services organization, including, for example, juvenile justice, youth services, child care, and employment and training. Although we have used many examples from child welfare in this first-generation material, all of the content is applicable to all human services sectors.

Although the overarching Workforce Planning approach may seem intimidating to small organizations, the concepts can be “scaled-back” to meet their needs. It may seem that the Workforce Planning model is geared toward large agencies with internal staff devoted exclusively to the human resources function. However, administrators and managers in small organizations can use the Portal’s content as a resource for addressing workforce issues. Many of the Gap-Closing Strategies (such as behavioral interviews, the performance management tools, and certain of the recruitment strategies) can be adapted to organizations of any size.

Q5: There is so much material in the Portal that it seems overwhelming. Do I have to read/use it all?

A5: No. We designed the WFP Portal so that you can use as much or as little of the content as you choose. The Portal includes Quick Steps – tactical tools like behavior-based interview questions and exit interview forms – that address specific workforce issues and practices. You can find specific answers to your immediate needs by using the Portal’s Table of Contents, browsing by HR topic, or searching by key word.

Q6. When doing Workforce Planning, must we use the model for our entire agency?

A.6: No. In fact, you cannot fix everything at once. An important part of workforce planning is assessing what issues you are facing, what capabilities you have and what to do first. Your analysis may suggest that you start with a certain classification(s) of employees, a single office/location in a multi-location organization, or with a single organizational unit. Some agencies implementing a program reform (such as Family to Family or the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative) may want to concentrate their Workforce Planning efforts to support the implementation of those reforms.

Some changes, however, must eventually be implemented throughout the organization or system for the full impact to be felt.

Q7: If we don't have a strategic plan, can my organization still do Workforce Planning?

A7: Although we recommend that all organizations – irrespective of size – have a strategic plan, it is possible to implement some of the Gap-Closing Strategies without one. Many organizations that do not have a document they expressly call a “strategic plan” use their budget process to set goals for the upcoming year. Aligning your workforce plan with your budget process will assist the agency in making informed workforce decisions that can be reflected in your annual budget.

Whether tied to a strategic plan, a budget or something else, the critical thing is that workforce planning is woven into the important work of the organization and not seen as a discrete function over to the side that only specialists worry about.

Q8: Can we do Workforce Planning without workforce data?

A8: Whether or not an agency is engaged in comprehensive workforce planning, we believe it is important to have and use workforce data. The workforce is central to the organization's success and solid data about it is critically important. Although most organizations lack the full range of data that would be ideal, all agencies have some data that can be useful in conducting Workforce Planning. Agencies may use the Workforce Planning process to identify what data they want to begin to collect (i.e. turnover statistics) and use the Portal's tools to begin to create their own systems for this information.

Q9: What if we need help to make effective use of the information in the portal?

A9: Some agencies may choose to access locally based, regional or national technical consultation to help them with the workforce planning process or to put into place discrete strategies they believe will help them further their strategic goals. We recommend, however, that the agency first assess whether or not the capacity for that consultation resides within the organization. Many human services agencies, for example, lack an effective working relationship with their human resources office and we encourage strong partnerships between HS and HR staff and departments.

In addition, the workforce planning model encourages agency staff and leaders, as well as their strategic partners, to build their own capacity to develop and sustain a workforce plan. Technical consultation can help facilitate a good workforce plan, but ownership for the plan must reside with the leaders, managers and front line staff of the organization.