



Thinking & Planning ahead

resource manual
for community legal centre staff

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Introduction to Planning

1. Planning

1.1 Definition

Planning is the process of:

- setting the vision and mission of the centre (goals);
- developing strategies for the services; and
- carrying out ongoing evaluation in order to achieve goals.

1.1 Purpose of planning

Planning enables centres to answer important questions, such as:

- *Why* was the centre established?
- *What* kind of services does the centre deliver now?
- Does the centre need to make any changes to the service delivery model or organisational infrastructure in the future?
- *How* will the centre achieve organisational goals for the future?

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) should recognise that operational and strategic planning, together with ongoing evaluation, are essential activities to undertake when working towards achieving the aims and objectives of the centre. These activities are ongoing processes that support continuous quality improvement; it is important that they are integrated and undertaken across the whole centre.

In short, planning assists centres to:

- set their vision;
- identify needs and define issues;
- prioritise issues;
- generate solutions;
- capacity build, i.e. obtain resources to support the service delivery model; and
- evaluate and continuously ensure quality improvement.



2. Strategic planning

2.1 Definition

A strategy identified by a centre determines:

- where the centre is placed at the time;
- the direction the centre intends to go in, and why; and finally
- how the centre will get there.¹

2.1 Features

The core philosophy and purpose of a centre guides the development of the strategic plan. The plan should take into consideration the political, social and economic needs of the community that the CLC services. The ongoing services that the centre provides, together with an evaluation of its work (see section 8 'Evaluation', below), will provide input into the development of the strategic plan.

A strategic plan for CLCs should include some of the following features:

1. a listing of the target groups to whom legal advice / casework services should be provided;
2. plans for community development activities and law reform work;
3. strategies for dealing with day-to-day activities, which also includes organisational development work;
4. an indication of how the centre will operate in two or three years time; and
5. details on how the centre will involve all levels of management, staff, volunteers, external stakeholders and the community in the development of the plan.

2.1 Terminology

Aim: A *general* statement of what the centre wants to achieve.

Objectives: *Specific* statements about what the centre wants to achieve. Objectives have to be achievable and time bound.

Strategy: A description of how objectives are going to be achieved.²

1 This information has been sourced from <www.mapl.com.au> (Paul Bullen, Management Alternatives Pty Ltd).

2 This information has been sourced from the Planning Models: Model 1 — Strategic Planning, developed by Paul Bullen, Management Alternatives Pty Ltd at <www.mapl.com.au>.

3. The SWOT analysis — an approach to planning

3.1 Definition

A SWOT analysis is a tool that can help centres review their internal and external environments. SWOT stands for:

S — strengths

W — weaknesses

O — opportunities

T — threats (However, it is appropriate for centres to consider them as challenges instead.)

Board or committee members, staff, volunteers, clients and the community can all undertake a SWOT analysis. It is interesting to note that sometimes each of these groups will have different interpretations and the outcomes of a SWOT analysis may vary.

3.1 Purpose of a SWOT analysis

Looking at the different results from the analysis will assist the centre when considering the work and services of the organisation, as a SWOT analysis creates a picture for the centre and provides a broader overview of the environment in which it operates. However, undertaking a SWOT analysis is only a part of the planning process — it simply provides a creative tool and checklist for the centre — it is not the centre's final strategic plan complete with timelines and objectives.

To summarise, a SWOT analysis provides:

- a list of recommendations for the centre to consider while developing the strategic plan;
- a process that also helps the centre to realign the service delivery model to the goals of the centre; and
- support to identify the partnerships and collaborations for the centre to establish.



4. The planning process

The planning process will assist the centre to honestly evaluate its services and activities. The outcomes of this process will provide input to the centre to plan the changes or improvements to the current service delivery model.

Note the following points:

- The planning process should always include the key stakeholders: Board (Committee members), staff, volunteers, clients, community, funding bodies and external stakeholders. It is important to ensure the key stakeholders are familiar with the centre's key objectives and goals.
- The process should be well documented and provide a detailed plan for how the centre will know what services have been provided, staffing and resources, time period, and outcomes.
- A staff member/Working Group should be delegated the responsibility to take leadership to plan and organise the Planning Day, which should be held annually.
- When planning, get input from everyone who will be responsible for carrying out parts of the plan, along with representatives from client groups who will be affected by the plan. Of course, the Management Committee also should be involved in developing the plan, as they will be responsible for its review and authorisation. It is important for the planning process to be very inclusive and encourage participation.

5. The Commonwealth Legal Centres Progress Plan (CLSP Plan — aka the VLA Work Plan)

5.1 Introduction

Each centre submits a work plan for a three-year timeframe in line with the triennial service agreement. Many centres are moving towards developing their three-year strategic plan, which is the plan either submitted to Victoria Legal Aid as their work plan, or which feeds into the work plan. It is very important to ensure there are not many separate centre plans, which can be very confusing for staff to understand and will not support the Management Committee members.

5.1 How does this plan work?

- Centres will provide their work plan to VLA in the required format for the term of their agreement (the three-year work plan).
- The State Program Manager approves the work plan. It is important that the centre understands that it is their plan and that it is very important to negotiate the outcomes clearly with the funding body (i.e. VLA).
- The plan should be clear and realistic. It is always important to ensure that the activities in the plan reflect the level of funding provided.
- Centres are to provide six-monthly progress reports against the plan. It is very important to understand that the progress report is a tool to articulate to the funding bodies:
 - » if the activity was undertaken, when, where and how was it evaluated; and
 - » if the activity was not undertaken, the reasons why it was not undertaken.

For the six-monthly progress report, often centres may not have had the ability to complete the activities planned owing to many challenging situations, e.g. staff change, the needs identified for the community may have changed, or other responsive / reactive work may have emerged for the centre during the reporting period. At the end of the financial year the centre will provide a report on the year's activity and also make variations to the next year's plan based on the outcomes of the previous year. It is always important to inform the State Program Manager of changes to the plan, and it is also acceptable to submit a new plan if there are significant changes.

5.1 Role of the CLSP Plan as an accountability tool

1. The information in the work plan is important for the funding body to ascertain if the legal service is providing the activities for which it is funded. However, the work plan can also be used within the organisation for the staff to be accountable to each other and the

Management Committee.

2. It can be used as a tool to measure the effectiveness of the activities offered by the legal service.
3. It can also be used to measure the activities undertaken by volunteers or identify the unfunded activities of the organisation.

5.1 Mandatory quantitative performance indicators

The outputs are not necessarily part of the CLSP planning process (unless a centre decides that this is how they would prefer to plan). However, this information is put into the Community Legal Service Information System (CLSIS) for the approval of State Program Manager each year.

Note that including the indicators in the work plan will enable staff to look at a single document and understand the agreed outcomes for casework, community development and law reform activities.

5.1 Elements of the CLSP Plan

Element	Definition	Example
Vision	The social outcome the centre wants to achieve, i.e. the overall picture.	For a just and accessible legal system.
Values	What the organisation is committed to, the shared understanding or the principals that inform the work.	To provide a reliable and accessible legal service for diverse communities.
Mission	The overarching aim of the organisation.	To provide legal services for the disadvantaged members of the XXX region.
Objectives	The general aims and functions of the centre. Work undertaken that directly or indirectly is very important for the organisation. Each objective will have several strategies.	To reduce the unmet legal needs of the XXX region through a range of legal activities.
Strategies	Individual services and activities that work towards an objective.	* To provide timely and accessible legal advice at an outreach service. ** To provide community legal education sessions for young people.

Actions	Actions will provide information on how the strategy will be implemented: who, what, when, where, how often or how many.	* Provide face-to-face service at XXX region in YYY location. ** Provide community legal education sessions for young people at ZZZ school in YYY location.
Performance Indicators	State how the strategy will be achieved and how will the centre demonstrate the strategy as a measurable outcome.	* One lawyer will provide advice. Face to face appointments on Wednesdays. 90% of the appointments will be used. To total no longer than 48 hours. ** Two sessions held per year. Effectiveness will be measured if school agrees to continue sessions.

5.1 Tips for developing the CLSP plan

- Include the different members of the centre, staff (legal and non-legal) Management Committee members and volunteers.
- Start developing the plan early. Group work should be encouraged.
- Link one activity of the centre to the other. Plan across, not in isolation.
- Think of resources and how you will evaluate the plan.
- Include some timelines in the plan.
- Think of both quantitative and qualitative outcomes.
- Plans should not be too long. They need to be concise, easy to understand and reflect the true picture.
- Make the plan a living document with clear priorities.

5.1 Progress reports

- Use the progress report to showcase your work. The six-monthly reports should provide an account of the effectiveness of the actions (see table, above). It is important to ask questions, such as 'how well did the activity run?' in order to support the centre move towards its objective vision and mission.
- If you were not in position to complete an action, write a short summary and state why the action was not completed.
- Use the work plan to inform funding bodies about the difficulties in the service and advocate or lobby for funding if there are significant gaps.

5.1 Source

This information has been sourced from the *CLSP Planning Guide*, developed by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department,

