

SECTION 210—PREPARING AND SUBMITTING AN AGENCY STRATEGIC PLAN

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Summary of Changes

Emphasizes the strategic plan's role for presenting the agency's most important performance goals over the planning horizon (section [210.1](#)).

Emphasizes personnel accountability for performance goals (section [210.1](#)).

Distinguishes between strategy and means, explains the importance of both, and includes planned actions to implement and execute strategy in the strategy and means discussions (section [210.2](#)).

210.1 What is an agency strategic plan and what is its purpose?

An agency's strategic plan defines its missions, goals, and the means by which it will measure its progress in addressing specific national problems, needs, or challenges related to its mission over the course of at least five years. It appraises the agency's capabilities, assesses the operating environment, and provides for evaluation of the strategy. A strategic plan presents a commitment to perform by describing specific results the agency aims to achieve, what actions the agency will take to realize those planned results, and how the agency will deal with current and foreseeable internal and external challenges and risks that may hinder achieving those results.

The strategic plan shall cover a period of not less than five years forward from the fiscal year in which it is submitted, and is updated or revised at least every three years as required by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, as amended ([5 U.S.C. 306](#)). The first strategic plan issued by an agency during a new Administration represents a significant opportunity for the agency to revisit its general goals and objectives.

An agency formulates its strategic plan with inputs from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Congress, the public, and the agency's personnel, partners, and stakeholders and, when completed, makes the plan easily accessible to all. In addition to fulfilling GPRA requirements, the strategic plan serves a number of important management roles and functions related to achieving an agency's mission:

Leadership. The strategic plan allows agency leadership to establish and communicate priorities and direction through a strategic and unified vision.

Planning. The strategic plan is the foundation of an agency's planning system because it provides the strategic direction for programmatic and management functions, such as human resources, information management, acquisition management, and budget and finance, to help execute the strategies needed to reach the defined goals. Strategic plans also increase leadership accountability and enhance the ability of agency executives to plan. Executives can use the strategic plan to establish priorities and allocate resources across the agency's component organizations, better ensure consistent management practice, and provide guidance to these components or bureaus for planning their program implementation needs. The accountability for

results is shared among all agency personnel and partners through other agency planning documents.

Measurement/Assessment. The strategic plan features declarative statements also known as strategic goals, which state what the agency wants to accomplish in terms of outcomes or results. Each strategic goal is supported by performance goals – performance measures with time-specific targets. Agency strategic plans also provide a framework for annual performance plans and reports. In addition to these annual plans and reports, managers are encouraged to frequently compare actual results of performance measures against their time-specific targets and previous levels of performance to assess progress towards meeting strategic goals. This routine measurement and comparison of performance, in addition to more rigorous program evaluations, will help managers find ways to improve performance and identify promising strategies that will drive performance improvement.

Management. To achieve their strategic goals, agencies will promote a results-oriented culture by creating practices and incentives that enable its employees to efficiently complete projects, initiatives, and operations that implement and execute the agency’s strategy. To succeed, agencies and inter-agency bodies must have an effective system of governance to efficiently carry out their missions.

Aligning organizational and individual results. Managers and employees are responsible for aligning resources and responsibilities to achieve results that clearly link to the goals outlined in the strategic plan. For example, the Senior Executive Service personnel system requires the Office of Personnel Management certify the agencies' performance appraisal systems, with OMB concurrence. Overall, employee performance drives organizational performance. Individual performance plans should have appraisal standards that sufficiently link to successful accomplishment of program performance goals included in the agency’s annual performance plans and reports. Similarly, the performance goals appearing in performance plans and reports should clearly link to successful accomplishment of the agency’s strategic goals.

Transparency. When developing a strategic plan, GPRA requires agencies to “consult with the Congress, and shall solicit and consider the views and suggestions of those entities potentially affected by or interested in such a plan.” The plan should provide a variety of internal and external audiences with a sense of the mission, priorities, strategies, and accountability structure of the agency.

210.2 What are the components of an agency strategic plan?

The agency strategic plan presents the agency’s approach to solving or addressing mission-related problems. There is no prescribed format for the agency strategic plan. However, the plan should present a structured format that contains the specific elements required by GPRA and helps advance the roles and functions outlined by including the following components:

Mission statement – A brief, easy-to-understand narrative, usually no more than two or three sentences long, that defines the basic purpose of the agency and is consistent with the agency’s core programs and activities expressed within the broad context of the national problems, needs, or challenges the agency faces. This statement is important as the strategic goals should be developed to further the agency’s mission. In addition to the mission statement, many agencies also include a vision statement to express how the agency intends to accomplish its mission in broad terms, especially when an agency has a diverse set of related missions, or numerous sets of strategic goals.

Strategic goals – GPRA requires “general goals and objectives, including outcome-related goals and objectives, for the major functions and operations of the agency to be included in the plan.” Agencies use strategic goals and objectives to articulate clear statements of what the agency

wants to achieve relevant to its national problems, needs, or challenges, and how it expects to achieve them.

Along with these statements, the strategic plan should broadly describe the operational processes, skills, and technology, and the human capital, information, and other resources required to meet these strategic goals. Other key planning documents such as the human capital and workforce plans, information resources management plans, acquisition plans, or other agency and relevant inter-agency management and performance plans should be linked as appropriate in the strategic plan.

Performance goals – GPRA requires the strategic plan to describe the relationship between the performance goals and the strategic goals. Performance goals determine priorities and set targets as well as allow agencies and the public to track progress on reaching its goals. A performance goal defines the targeted level of performance over time expressed as a tangible, measurable objective, against which actual achievement can be compared, including a goal expressed as a quantitative standard, value, or rate.

For each strategic goal included in the strategic plan, the agency should include in the plan a limited number of long-term, outcome-oriented performance goals. A long-term performance goal's target typically extends 3 to 5 years into the future, but is often monitored and measured at least annually and is reported in the agency's annual performance reports. Furthermore, performance results are often reviewed quarterly in the agency's review meetings so that problems can be identified and acted upon as needed to increase the probability of the agency achieving its desired outcome.

In addition, agencies can also identify key areas critical to the achievement of a strategic goal that are not measured quantitatively, and goals with targets relative to relevant benchmarks.

For example, within the Department of Education's strategic goal for higher education, the plan would likely include recent goals announced by the President of the US:

1. To lead the world in college degrees by 2020.
2. Graduate 5 million more Americans from community colleges by 2020.

These goals would likely be supported by annual goals in the agency's annual performance plan and report as well as operational and process measures that could be tracked more frequently.

External risk factors – GPRA requires “identification of those key factors external to the agency and beyond its control that could significantly affect the achievement of the strategic goals.” External factors are those introduced by external forces or parties, and are not of the agency's own making. External factors may be economic, demographic, social, or environmental, and they may remain stable, change within predicted rates, or vary to an unexpected degree. A strategy's dependence on the actions of Congress, other Federal agencies, States, local governments, or other non-Federal entities are also external factors that need to be addressed by the agency strategy. The external factors can provide helpful context for the strategic goal, for example, the portion of total education spending coming from the Federal government.

Strategies and Means. In the discussion of each strategic goal, the agency should describe:

1. The strategies program managers will use to acquire, deploy, and manage resources to contribute to actions, outputs, or services that will lead to results. The discussion about resources should be informed by the agency's resource management plans that estimate resource requirements and address the opportunities and challenges in acquiring them and making them usable and effective. However, a strategic plan is not a budget request; the projected levels of goal achievement must be commensurate with anticipated resource

levels. Furthermore, the strategic plan should not bind the Administration to new budget or legislative commitments.

2. The roles and responsibilities of key agency program and administrative activities, and external agency partners that apply key resources toward the agency goals (e.g. other federal programs, grantees; state, local, tribal, and foreign governments; major long-term contractors, etc.).
3. The major initiatives the agency plans to take to implement and execute the strategy. The initiatives might include key activities that are essential for implementation and execution to achieve the long-term performance goals. The description should include the office, job title or position within the agency and agency partners responsible for accomplishing each step, and the timeframe in which the step would be completed. The strategic plan can provide this information along with more detailed description of projects and steps as links to documents available on the agency's web site. The agency should continually monitor and track strategy implementation and execution progress using measures that would appear in annual performance plans and reports.

Program evaluations – GPRA specifically requires a description of the program evaluations used in establishing or revising strategic goals with a schedule for future evaluations. The agency's schedule of future evaluations should go beyond simply listing evaluation topics for planned studies and instead should briefly describe the objectives of planned evaluations and why they are relevant to decision-making.

See section [200.2](#) for comprehensive definitions of the key planning elements.

210.3 Submission of strategic plans

(a) *Timing of strategic plan submissions.*

GPRA requires agencies to submit an updated and revised strategic plan to the Congress and OMB within three years of submitting its previous strategic plan.

Consistent with current policy and practice regarding interagency clearance of certain material being sent to the Congress, agencies should submit to OMB for review and clearance an advance copy of an updated strategic plan at least 45 days prior to the date for transmitting the plan to the Congress and making it available to the public.

(b) *Consultation and outreach.*

When preparing a strategic plan, agencies must consult with the Congress and OMB and solicit and consider the views of interested and potentially affected parties. Consultation could include hosting public meetings on the draft plan and posting the draft plan on the internet and inviting comment. This consultation and outreach may result in contrary views being expressed.

(c) *Transmitting plans to the Congress and OMB.*

The plan is transmitted to the Congress and OMB by the agency head. Transmittal letters are addressed to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President and the President pro tempore of the Senate, and the OMB Director. Distribution is also made to relevant committees of the Congress. The letter transmitting the agency's strategic plan to the Congress includes a summary of the consultation and outreach processes, and any contrary views that resulted.

The GPRA states that the preparation of a strategic plan is an inherently governmental function, and the plan is to be drafted only by Federal employees. However, when preparing a plan, agencies may be

assisted by non-Federal parties, such as consultants or contractors who are hired specifically to provide technical input on the design and assembly of the plan, and who are not solicited for their input on policy or budget issues. The transmittal should include an acknowledgment and brief description of the contribution by a non-Federal entity in preparing the plan.

Strategic plans are a matter of public record, so the public should be afforded the opportunity to access the completed plan. Agencies should place the strategic plan on their website, or make it available through other electronic media. Generally, a strategic plan should become publicly available when the plan is transmitted to the Congress.

210.4 Interim adjustments to strategic plans

(a) *Scope of interim adjustments.*

An agency may make minor adjustments to a strategic plan in advance of the three-year revision cycle. Adjustments can include changes to the strategic goals, long-term performance goals, the means and strategies used to achieve the goals, the key external factors, or the program evaluation schedule. Modifications may reflect altered circumstances or evaluations of program performance. Interim adjustments are selective and do not produce widespread changes in a plan. An agency need not consult with the Congress or conduct outreach to potentially interested or affected parties when preparing interim adjustments.

Significant changes to an agency's strategic plan are made using a more extensive update process, even if this accelerates the three-year revision cycle. Consultation requirements apply in these instances. Interim adjustments, on the other hand, do not alter the three-year revision cycle for strategic plans.

(b) *Transmittal of interim adjustments.*

Interim adjustments do not require a formal transmittal. An agency may append an interim adjustment to its budget submission as a separate, easily found section, and present only the adjustments, not the entire strategic plan. The interim adjustments should be included both in the performance budget sent to OMB in September and in the performance budget (congressional justification) sent to the Congress in February. An agency should distribute, or otherwise make publicly available, the interim adjustments so readers can reference or review the most current strategic plan content.

