

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE COUNCIL

GETTING STARTED: SETTING GOALS AND PRIORITIES

It is important that your School Governance Council establish priorities and set goals, and stick to them. Otherwise, there is a real chance that your council will wander, wondering what to do first or, even worse, trying to do too much and not being as productive as it could be. Determining priorities will allow members to focus on areas of activity chosen for special emphasis over a period of time. Setting goals will give members a clear sense of what they want to achieve over the course of their term.

At the beginning of the school year, your council may wish to determine the expectations and priorities of the school community and find ways to meet them. Your council may want to open their planning discussion by asking these questions:

Where are we?

Where do we want to go?

How will we get there?

How will we know when we have arrived?

These questions will initiate discussion and give council members the opportunity to share information and generate ideas. All members of the council, including the principal, will have the opportunity to review information about past and current achievement, imagine the school's future and develop specific plans for achieving their vision for the future. This is just the beginning of the planning process. To monitor progress, goals and priorities should be reviewed quarterly. Based on the review, the plan may be adjusted, if necessary, so that expectations can be met.

This type of planning:

- provides a framework for determining how the school council can improve its performance;
- focuses efforts and resources effectively on the goals set by the council;
- provides a framework for decision making, since decisions are linked to goals;
- encourages teamwork by involving all members of the school council; and
- maximizes the use of time

The following sample exercises may be used individually or in sequence depending on the needs of your School Governance Council. They can be completed at meetings of your council throughout the course of the year and do not necessarily have to be completed within the first few months. Planning takes time, so be prepared to spend time in the planning process.

Adapted from: *School Councils: A Guide for Members* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002).

Sample Goal-Setting and Planning Exercises

Exercise 1: Assessing the current situation

This exercise may help your school council identify issues – an important step in the planning process.

In small groups, discuss the following questions:

- Who are our students?
- How have they performed on province-wide tests?
- What is our community like and what are the school's relations with the community?
- What are the emerging trends in education?

Appoint a facilitator in each group to stimulate discussion and to group ideas. Allot ample time so that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. When the allotted time is up, ask the facilitators to present the ideas to the whole council. A main facilitator should then summarize the information. This summary will help your council identify its priorities.

Exercise 2: Identifying the issues

This exercise may help your school council identify issues and prioritize them for discussion at a subsequent meeting. In this way your council can begin to establish its long-term priorities. Each school council member should answer the first three questions individually. Then the whole council should review common issues and prioritize them for further discussion.

1. List, in order, the top educational issues in your community today.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. List, in order, the top issues for your school and School Governance Council.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. Do you think the list of issues noted in #2 or their order will change over the longer term (within the next two to three years)? If you do, show the revised list below. This information will be useful for long-term planning.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4. Compare lists created by the individual members of the council. What common issues have been identified?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

5. Choose one of more of the common issues for discussion.

6. Identify your goals based on the priorities that have now been established.

Exercise 3: Identifying goals – A process for developing group goals.

Since School Governance Councils are fairly large, this exercise is a good way of involving all members when establishing the school’s long-term goals.

(Participants should be in groups of four or five)

- Have each person write five to six phrases on separate self-stick notes that each identify a goal, purpose, or direction.
- Place each of your group’s participants’ phrases on a flipchart, grouping common goals.
- Discuss the common goals in your group and become familiar with the ideas.
- Develop at least one goal statement for each of these common ideas.
- Together with other groups, compare the lists and develop a common list of goals.
- Based on consensus, prioritize goals.
- For each goal statement, identify internal and external forces that may help or hinder you in reaching your goals.
- Back in your small groups, seek creative ways and alternative solutions to achieving your short- and long-term goals.

Exercise 4: Developing an action plan

This exercise can help you focus on the goals you have identified and provide you with concrete and creative ways of achieving them. Start with the following strategies:

- For each identified goal, brainstorm a number of ways to achieve it.
- Determine the most promising strategies – those for which time, talent, and resources are available.
- Develop an action plan.

The format of your action plan could resemble that of the sample on the following page. Such a plan would identify the activities you are planning to achieve your goals, those responsible for the activities, the necessary deadlines, and the resources needed to carry out the activities successfully. The last column of the action plan could be used to evaluate the activities in relation to the achievement of the council’s goals.

Exercise 4: Developing an action plan (continued)

Action Plan for: _____

Year: _____

Goal: _____

Page #: _____

Activities	Person(s) Responsible	Deadline	Resources Required	Evaluation