

Extract from Synergy APDIME website:

http://www.synergyaids.com/apdime/mod_2_planning/planning_index.htm

Based on the review of your assessment findings, the priority-setting process is designed to help you find the optimal and most viable fit between your available resources, comparative institutional strengths, and opportunities. It helps you answer the question: "What makes the most sense?"

Methodology for Priority Setting

The following six steps may help to determine the priority program elements or activities for intervention.

1. Analyze problem

Based on a review of the assessment findings, conduct a problem analysis to identify which problems are most important to address. By consensus, identify activities or solutions for each problem within range of existing resources.

2. Map situation

Use a mapping exercise to identify the causal linkages between actions, to determine which activities are interdependent, and which ones need to occur before the other in order for the strategic plan to achieve the desired set of outcomes, and its SO expressed at the purpose level.

3. Rank program elements

Rank the program elements to arrive at a more targeted number of priorities and needs that must be addressed. The planning team should achieve consensus on the criteria for ranking and weighting before embarking on this process. The expected outcome of the ranking exercise is to arrive at a set of priority activities that will allow you to achieve the greatest possible impact with the least attributable risk.

Possible ranking criteria include:

- a) How important is the activity?
- b) Is change in this area feasible?
- c) How large is the population group affected by this activity?
- d) How popular would resulting improvements be?
- e) What is the cost of change vs. the cost of no change?
- f) Will change cost money?
- g) Will change cost staff time?
- h) Will change save staff time?
- i) Is there sufficient absorptive capacity to achieve this change?
- j) Does the activity have a bearing on access, utilization, efficiency, equity, or quality of services?

4. Compare selections with standards;

Compare the selection of priority program elements with ideal comprehensive program elements such as the **Universal Framework of Objectives** or the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment Objectives to finalize the selection of the essential, priority activities to be addressed in the strategic plan. The UFO, as an analysis tool, allows you to confirm the set of priority activities that your organization can best contribute to the achievement of a comprehensive HIV/AIDS response at the community, district, national, or regional level.

5. Analyze cost effectiveness

Use cost-effectiveness analysis as a tool for optimizing the mix of interventions and achieving maximum impact. Cost-effectiveness analysis allows you to use modeling approaches to aid the formulation of strategic choices on how to achieve the greatest impact through the sets of priorities that have been identified. Cost-effectiveness analysis provides a framework for evaluating the following:

- Cost of material resources—the amount and kinds of facilities, equipment, and supplies — determining what services can be offered and how accessible they are. Human resources—provider qualifications, training opportunities, and supervision policies—determining how knowledgeable service providers are and what services they can provide. Organizational arrangements—the allocation of authority and responsibility—determining whether providers feel motivated or discouraged.
- Range and mix of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment services that should be planned realistically, considering program resources (Morris et al., 1996; Estébanez, 1993). Safe and

effective care demands a minimum level of resources (Effective HIV/AIDS Activities..., 1996; UN System Integrated Planning for HIV/AIDS, N/D). Lack of adequate resources forces planners to make difficult choices as part of the quality design process; for example, whether to limit the number of services or else to reduce the number of people who can be served.

- Quality design decisions, which often involve weighing the costs, risks, and benefits of different interventions or services, and modes of service delivery. This is the approach to contraceptive introduction taken by the UNDP/UNFPA/WHO/World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development, and Research Training in Human Reproduction (UNAIDS, Responses that Work and Lessons Learned..., 2000). The first step in the process is to examine clients' needs and the capacity of the service delivery system to offer proposed new methods safely and effectively. Such an assessment led the Government of Vietnam to postpone widespread introduction of Norplant® implants until technical quality of care and counseling could be improved (UNAIDS, Partners in Prevention..., 1998).

6. Confirm priority activities and interventions, or services, with stakeholders

Reach a consensus among stakeholders on your priority activities and interventions, or services. Ensure that this process is as participatory as possible. One approach to gain stakeholder inputs and to ensure that the plan is responsive to local needs, is to organize joint planning meetings or workshops. This is especially recommended where key stakeholders differ in perspective and priorities (e.g., NGOs and governments), or different government levels and sectors. Where possible, such meetings should be scheduled by, or in collaboration with, the UNAIDS Country Program Advisor. A stakeholder meeting creates a forum in which the different players can learn from and influence each other while they provide advice to the program developers. This is the principal method for establishing transparency, as all parties are part of the same conversation.