

OMTA Definitions:

Objectives, Measures, Targets, and Actions

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What is OMTA?

The OMTA approach is a modified version of the OMTI approach that emerged from the Balanced Scorecard methodology as a best practice for strategy management. OMTI stands for Objectives, Measures, Targets and Initiatives. To better align with public health and social sector terminology, we switched “Initiatives” to “Actions” resulting in the OMTA process. The structure and the sequential order in which a collaborative strategy is created and implemented is important. The OMTA acronym serves as a reminder that it is usually best to get clarity on the **Objectives** *before* wrestling with the details of the **Measures, Targets** and **Actions**.

Objectives

Objectives are desired changes that a community or organization will work toward, usually for several years. Ideally, these **Objectives** would be viewed in a strategy map as an interrelated *system* of changes, but that is not always the case. Some **Objectives** (changes) are community-level *outcome* Objectives (such as improvements in community health status) and others are community-level *strategy* Objectives, also called *driver* Objectives. The strategy **Objectives** are changes that the community will work on (such as improving access to healthy food) in order to achieve the *outcome* **Objective** (reducing obesity). There may also be more detailed **Objectives** that are specific to a particular organization or grant. Ideally, those organizational or grant-specific **Objectives** should align with and support the higher-level community Objectives.

Objectives vs. Actions

Objectives are the *intentional changes* that an organization or community can align around and work towards. The Objectives are not just a description of the on-going operations of an organization, nor are they the short-term **Actions** (projects) that are can be completed in a relatively short period of time. Grant-specific **Objectives** or organizational **Objectives** may be more narrowly focused, but they should have the same characteristics (not be specific projects or on-going operations).

Given the length of time it takes for a coalition to build consensus and to implement changes that significantly improve health outcomes in a community, a well-designed strategy should be described in a way that will not change every year. If the strategy consists primarily of specific short-term **Actions**, then the strategy will likely need to be re-created annually, wasting a lot of time and disrupting efforts to build more advanced collaboration for bigger and more lasting changes. Therefore, in well-designed strategic plans for communities, the **Objectives** do not include the **Measures, Targets** or **Actions** that are also part of the strategy and strategy management system. The **Objectives** describe changes that the community will align around and work together to achieve, *but the wording of the Objectives should not specify how those changes will be measured*. (**Measures** will be added in the next step.)

Defining Objectives

Objectives should ideally have a short name that starts with a verb that indicates the nature of the change. Objective names are often put in “Title Case” and capitalize the first letter of all the major words. This practice reinforces the thinking that the **Objective** name is not a detailed sentence; it is a concise statement of the desired change—with more details to follow. Each **Objective** also has a description and other information that provides detail about the **Objective**.

Examples would be:

Strategy (or Driver) Objectives →	Outcome Objectives
Improve Access to Affordable Healthy Food	Reduce Obesity
Increase Use of Telehealth to Address Mental Health Needs	Reduce Unmet Mental Health Needs
Shift from a Punishment to a Treatment Orientation for Law Enforcement	Reduce Misuse of Opioids
Reduce Stigma of Substance Use Disorders and Treatment	Increase People in Successful Long-term Recovery

Working with Objectives

Once there is agreement on draft set of **Objectives**, the next steps in the process can be delegated to different smaller groups working in parallel on the next level of details, specifically:

- *Establish a “lead advocate” for each strategy **Objective**.* This person is not responsible for doing the work to accomplish the Objective, but they can be an ambassador and spokesperson for that **Objective**, allowing more efficient delegation and communication. In some communities where there has been a lot of competition among organizations working to address an issue, the “lead advocate” role can be a small team of peers rather than an individual.
- *Define a “From-To Gap” that clarifies the current state and the desired state to help clarify the gap between those states for each strategy **Objective**.* This is a valuable step in enhancing the clarity and consensus that helps accelerate strategy implementation. Defining the “From-To Gap” also helps spur creativity regarding how that gap could be closed, how to measure progress, and who might collaborate to help close the gap.
- *Identify the current efforts that are under way to help close the gap for each strategy **Objective**.* Once these are identified, explore how those efforts could be enhanced by better teamwork, “assists” from other organizations that might not currently be involved, and the use of new technologies or processes. This often results in some quick wins for the coalition.

Objectives are intentional changes that will take significant time to achieve, so it is important to monitor progress from year to year. Therefore, it is valuable to have quantitative **Measures** to be able to track progress for each **Objective** and inform decisions for making adjustments along the journey.

Measures

Use Measures to Manage and Monitor the Objectives, Not Just Evaluate the Actions

The use of **Measures** in strategy management (and in the OMTA model) is different from the use of measures in common *evaluation* practices. When focusing on evaluation, there is often an emphasis on developing measures for all the **Actions** that are part of the strategy so that the effectiveness of those actions can be evaluated. In contrast, in the OMTA model, the **Measures** are used to monitor the progress of accomplishing the **Objectives** rather than trying to quantify and evaluate each of the multitude of **Actions**.

Switching from measures used primarily for *evaluating* actions or programs to **Measures** used for *managing* strategy implementation has important implications and benefits. Instead of asking for the **Action** and *then* asking for the measure of success (for evaluation) for each **Action**, this switch changes the process to determining the **Measures** that need to be moved and then asking what **Actions** will be needed—often by many organizations working in mutually reinforcing ways—to move those **Measures** to the **Target** level. The switch results in a much smaller set of strategic **Measures** to maintain, and it allows more time to be spent on getting things done and less time spent in developing and managing the overhead of a large, cumbersome set of measures for all the **Actions**.

Defining Measures

The **Measures** are simply the best available, pragmatic, quantitative indicators of progress in achieving those **Objectives**. Measures must be quantitative--usually numbers, dollars, or percentages. Remember that as data is collected, there will be a trend chart to show progress with the measure over time. **Measures** are sometimes thought of as being either *leading Measures* or *lagging Measures*. Leading measures tend to measure things that show something that should eventually lead to the desired change. Lagging Measures are quantitative indicators of the desired change. It is good to have a mix of leading and lagging Measures. While it is not worth spending too much time trying to determine if a **Measure** is a leading or lagging **Measure**, thinking about leading and lagging **Measures** can often be helpful in coming up with a practical **Measure**. The following are examples of **Measures** (shown in the context of the Objectives they are monitoring.)

Strategy (or Driver) Objectives	Examples of Measures for those Objectives
Improve Access to Healthy Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual \$ sales by vendors at Farmers Markets• # of “Double Up Food Bucks” coupons redeemed at Farmers’ Markets• # of Stores actively participating in the Healthy Corner Stores program• # of New community garden plots and new home gardens

Increase Use of Telehealth to Address Mental Health Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of People participating in Telehealth to address mental health needs. • # of Healthcare providers making referrals to telehealth providers for mental health issues • # of People reached in educational events about telehealth options for mental health
Shift from a Punishment to a Treatment Orientation for Law Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of People connected to help via the Law Enforcement Angel Initiative • # of People placed into treatment instead of incarceration by the Drug Court
Reduce Stigma of Substance Use Disorders and Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score on the Substance Use Stigma Mechanisms Scale (SU-SMS) • # of Organizations active in efforts to reduce stigma of SUDs and Treatment

In the example regarding stigma, the first **Measure** is an example of a *lagging Measure*. It would show the current level of stigma regarding SUDs and treatment in a community, and the trend for that measure would indicate if progress were being made in reducing stigma. However, getting good data for that specific measure would likely be very expensive (surveying a large sample of the population), and the measurement instrument is still quite new and not strongly validated. The second **Measure** is a *leading Measure* for the same **Objective**. It is not what we are ultimately trying to achieve for this **Objective**, but if this leading **Measure** is moving in the right direction and meeting or exceeding the **Target** levels, we can have reasonable confidence that we're making progress on this **Objective**. *If we had a lagging Measure*, it would likely be moving in the right direction.

Targets

Traditional SMART goals or SMART objectives weave the measure and the end target into the SMART objective statement. They typically start with "By such-and-such date..." and go on to give a single target to be achieved by a future date. That can be used for an *evaluation* at the end of the time period, but the OMTA approach focuses on using measurement for *managing* the implementation of the strategy. This requires a time-series of **Targets** to determine if the coalition or organization is on track with the desired progress for achieving a change that will likely take several years to accomplish.

At times, it might seem necessary to first establish a baseline (ideally a historical series of data points) before setting a **Target**, but even in those situations, it is useful to put in a series of **Targets** even if there is a note that it might be updated in the future. When planning the launch of some new strategy, such as increasing home visitation programs for new parents, it is problematic if some people are thinking about reaching 150 parents by the third year and others are thinking the community should reach 5,000 parents for the same time period. When looking at measurement from a strategy management point of view, the **Target** is not primarily to evaluate

if you were successful or not, but rather to communicate an aspiration that gets people thinking about how it can be achieved. It is important to shift from an evaluation approach to **Targets** (where some people would be tempted to think “What’s the easiest target we can get away with?”) to an aspirational approach to **Targets** (where people are encouraged to think, “What should we strive to accomplish by working together?”)

Targets should be thought of as a way of communicating intent. If a coalition sets a **Target** of increasing from 12 to 15 community gardens over the next 5 years, not much will need to happen. But, if the **Target** is to go from 12 this year to 20 next year, 35 the following year, then 50 in the fourth year and 60 in the fifth year, that will require some serious thinking about how the community can work together to make that happen. It is important that leadership (and funders) see the **Targets** as a communication tool. They should not punish coalitions, organizations or individuals for not hitting their **Targets**—as long as they are using the **Targets** to drive collaborative effort to achieve the desired changes.

Measures	Examples of Targets for those Measures
Annual \$ sales by vendors at Farmers Markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2018: \$200,000 • 2019: \$250,000 • 2020: \$275,000 • 2021: \$300,000
# of People connected to help via the Law Enforcement Angel Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2018: 80 • 2019: 90 • 2020: 100 • 2021: 100

Actions

Once **Objectives** are defined and there is a preliminary plan for **Measures**, it is important to define a clear set of **Actions** with specific timelines and accountability. The following techniques can help improve the management of the **Actions**, allowing a community strategy to be successfully implemented.

- *Define **Actions** that can be completed in a relatively short time.* Achieving community health goals typically will take several years. However, if high-level **Actions** are defined with a five-year duration, there is not much urgency and short-term accountability to keep organizations moving forward at the necessary pace to achieve that long-term success. It may take 5 years to accomplish the **Objective**, but the **Actions** should generally be defined to be relatively short term so there is greater accountability for getting them done. It will usually take a LOT of **Actions** by many different organizations to achieve the type of changes that are usually part of the aspirational goals in Population Health strategies. If **Actions** are defined that can usually be completed in less than a year, with significant progress possible each month or quarter, the organizations responsible for specific **Actions** will feel an urgency to do things. With well-defined and relatively short-term **Actions**, progress can be managed much more effectively to achieve the long-term results.
- If individual **Actions** are too big, no organization will feel an appropriate level of accountability or be willing to accept ownership of an **Action**. But even narrowly defined, organization-specific **Actions** won't create much urgency if they are vaguely defined with five-year timelines. Because of their other urgent priorities, few organizations will do much to advance an **Action** that has a deadline that is five years out. The plan will likely be lost and forgotten by the time they feel any accountability to accomplish the **Action**.
- *Periodically refresh the **Actions**.* Each year (or possibly more frequently) a working group for that **Objective** (or cluster of **Objectives**) can agree on the specific **Actions** to be accomplished in the short term by specific members of the coalition. If specific parts of the strategy (an **Objective** or cluster of **Objectives**) are delegated to different working groups (sometimes called action teams), each of those groups can define a reasonable number of **Actions** that can be assigned to specific organizations and realistically accomplished in a relatively short period of time. People working on the **Actions** for one subset of the overall strategy don't need to be bothered with the specifics of the many detailed **Actions** being accomplished on other parts of the strategy.
- *Recruit Others in the Community who can Provide "Assists."* While each **Action** should have an owner responsible for taking the lead in getting the **Action** done, Collective Impact is greatly enhanced if the coalition--specifically the working group (action team) that is working on their subset of the overall strategy--is consistently looking for ways to engage other community organizations or individuals in providing "Assists." We borrow this term from sports, where some players may not score the points, but they help others to score the points. For example, a farmers' market may be trying to increase the number of vendors from a specific population in the community—such as the Latinix population. A faith community that has a lot of Latinix members may hold a meeting where the farmers' market staff can provide training on how to become a vendor.

- *Adopt Simplified **Action** Monitoring.* If **Actions** are defined to be narrow and relatively short-term, then they can often be measured by simply estimating the percentage complete. A status update note may include other quantitative indicators of how much has been accomplished, but these numbers don't need to be tracked like the strategy **Measures**. The organization responsible for each **Action** should make a monthly or quarterly estimate of the percentage of their **Action** that is already completed, along with a brief comment giving some explanation of what they did since the prior estimate. This approach to monitoring progress takes very little time (especially compared to tracking success measures for all the Actions), and it provides effective information, motivation, and accountability.

Example of Measures	Examples of Actions
Annual \$ sales by vendors at Farmers Markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement plan for local employers and faith communities to promote the farmers market. • Set up entertainment & training for 2019 farmers market season • Recruit vendors for new farmers market times & locations • Plan for new media coverage of farmers markets and special entertainment & education events
# of People connected to help via the Law Enforcement Angel Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct education sessions for law enforcement officers on Angel Program • Recruit and train new volunteers for the Angel Program • Plan and implement media campaign to raise awareness of the Angel Program • Join the PAARI network to learn other best practices for improving our Angel Program.

Additional Tips for Developing and Managing Actions

Actions usually have names that start with verbs, but the verbs are slightly different from those that start the **Objectives**. Verbs for **Actions** are typically “do” verbs like “Conduct” or “Create” and the verbs that start **Objectives** are usually “change” verbs like “Increase” or “Improve.”

Unlike **Objectives**, which in most cases require a significant number of different actions by different organizations over the years, the definition of an **Action** should allow for accountability for who does what by when. It is usually helpful to document key information for each **Action** (even if they are not known at the time the **Action** is initially proposed).

- A description that has more detail than just the **Action** name.
- Who the **Action** is assigned to (and, when appropriate, who it is assigned by)
- What is the start date and the end date for this **Action**?
- Are there supporting documents to better understand this **Action**?
- Is there a specific budget or grant requirements for this **Action**?

The entire coalition (or the leadership group) should not be trying to manage and discuss all the Actions. That creates an unnecessary bottleneck and limits what the coalition is able to do. Different working groups or teams should focus on the **Actions** for their subset of the overall

strategy and only bring appropriate information (significant victories, challenges that need help) to the attention of the larger group. If the information for the **Actions** is being tracked in an on-line platform, there can still be transparency and accountability regarding what is going on without needing to burden everyone with long meetings and large documents that include all the details.

Summary

Shifting from typical strategic plan and measurement dashboard development approaches to an approach based on the OMTA model is a major step towards improving the implementation of complex strategies that involve multiple stakeholders and require years of collaboration to achieve the desired change.

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