

Environmentally Preferred Sourcing Program

EPS Toolkit: Defining your vision

What is your facility's sustainability vision? How involved do you want to be in environmental efforts and programs? To answer these questions, start by creating a vision statement that describes the green work you want to do. Defining your vision is the first step in strategic planning.

A vision statement is a general declaration describing the goals you're striving to reach and an idealized picture of the future. A strong vision helps properly delineate strategic plans that serve as a guiding principle or ideal to use as a blueprint for measuring success. Defining your vision can provide many long-term benefits, including:

- Providing continuity and avoiding planning fits and starts
- Identifying direction and purpose
- Alerting stakeholders to needed change
- Promoting laser-like focus
- Encouraging openness to unique and creative solutions
- Building loyalty through involvement
- Setting standards of excellence that reflect high ideals and a sense of integrity
- Inspiring enthusiasm and encouraging commitment
- Helping all members set goals to advance the organization
- Providing a reference point when trying to overcome obstacles to success

What you can do

In addition to the information in the first few pages, the sections on setting goals and patient safety and the environment can also help you in this process.

The basis of a vision

A strategic vision is a view of an organization's future direction. It is a guiding concept for what the organization is trying to achieve or become. The focus of the organization's mission tends to be on the present, whereas the focus of a strategic vision is on the future. You may wish to incorporate a statement on environmental responsibility in your organization's present vision statement, or create a separate vision statement to address the work to be done in greening your facility.

Answer the following questions

Before trying to write out your vision, it is useful to answer the following questions:

1. What will our organization look like three to five years from now?
2. What is our green dream – even if it is beyond what we think is possible?
3. What direction do we need to move to accomplish this dream?
4. What environmental focus should our organization have?
5. What capabilities do we need to develop to reach our green dream?
6. What are our organization's core competencies, if any, related to corporate social responsibility and environmental stewardship?
7. What is our organization's history, strengths, unique capabilities, resources and assets, and how do they relate to environmentalism in health care?

Get creative

Exercise your creativity by completing one or both of these exercises:

1. It is five years from today's date and you have created your green hospital. Now it is your job, as a team, to describe it as if you were able to see it.
2. Visualize walking into a room three years from now and shaking hands with yourself. Who are you? What is your life like? What is your hospital like? Write down what you see and then discuss it as a group.

Determine what you want

Start by drawing an "as-is" picture to see where you need to change. Then look at alternatives — what others are doing, what products are available today, and what green services others offer. Finally, create a "to-be" image based on those insights. When envisioning the change, ask yourself, "What is our preferred future?" Be sure to do the following:

- Draw on the beliefs, mission and environment of the organization
- Describe what you want to see in the future
- Be specific, positive and inspiring
- Don't assume that the system will have the same framework as it does today
- Be open to dramatic modifications to the current organization, methodology, teaching techniques, facilities, etc.

Be alert to "vision killers"

As you engage in the visioning process, be alert to the following vision killers:

- Tradition
- Fear of ridicule
- Stereotypes of people, conditions and roles
- Complacency of some stakeholders
- Fatigued leaders
- Short-term thinking
- Naysayers

Gather examples from others

Organizational visioning is unique to your organization's culture, present situation and sense of the future. Therefore, it is not recommended that you simply gather three or four examples from others and create your vision. You need to go through the work above, and then use the vision statements of others to help you in creating your own.

Here are two examples:

1. Our vision is of a facility that incorporates sustainability into every decision we make. We are committed to incorporating environmentally responsible methods, products and services in every activity and finding new and better ways to conserve, reduce, reuse and recycle.
2. We value stewardship. We believe that the wise use of our resources today assures our ability to continue our mission tomorrow.

Double check your vision statement

Once you completed your vision statement, ask yourself whether it:

- Gives employees a larger sense of purpose
- Is well articulated, precise and easily understood
- Is positive, persuasive and credible
- Provides a vivid image about what the facility will look like in five to 10 years
- Provokes emotion and excitement
- Poses a challenge that inspires and engages people in the company
- Is ambitious and calls for a shared commitment
- Is connected to the overall corporate goals and mission-vision statement

Communicate the vision

Communication of a vision is the difficult process of inspiring others to see the future reality, which you see and are committed to make happen. Here are some things to do:

1. Carefully plan how you will get staff to become committed to the vision. The people who will help you implement your vision must embrace the vision.
2. Clearly articulate the vision and be enthusiastic about its benefits.
3. Repeatedly share the vision in various ways, in order to be effective. Communicate it through personal presentations, written communications, emails, staff newsletters, in meetings, and by placing plaques and engravings stating the vision in staff and public areas.
4. Live the vision by exhibiting behaviors that are consistent with the vision.
5. Share it externally to patients, suppliers and other stakeholders.
6. Pursue the vision — which draws people's attention and commitment to the vision. A snowball effect begins as people catch on to the vision.

Elements of a vision

Vision is a combination of three basic elements:

1. An organization's fundamental reason for existence
2. Its timeless, unchanging core values
3. A "big picture" aspiration for its own future

The vision of an organization defines who and what it is, why it exists, and where it is going in the grand scheme of things.

Sustainability, in a general sense, is the capacity to maintain a certain process or state indefinitely. In recent years the concept has been applied more specifically to living organisms and systems. Sustainability is also expressed as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Environmentalism is a philosophy centered on a concern for the conservation and improvement of the environment, both for its own sake as well as ours.

Setting goals

Setting goals builds on the previous step involving vision. Goals are a clearer statement of the vision, specifying the accomplishments to achieve if the vision is to become a reality. At this point, strategic planning begins to produce many ideas and action steps. A common practice for keeping individual workloads to a manageable level is to delegate different topics to different individuals. Accomplish this by creating a goal setting team or green team (see "Setting up a green team"). A goal setting team

should include both the staff with the hands-on experience in the topic but also the managers or department heads who are responsible for putting goals into action.

A goal is a general statement of intent that remains until it is achieved, the need for it disappears or the direction changes. It is a projected state of affairs that an individual or organization plans or intends to achieve or bring about — a desired end-point in some sort of assumed development. Many endeavor to reach goals within a finite time by setting deadlines.

Set SMART goals

Use the SMART principle to set your goals. This means that goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based.

Specific goals

Goals should be straightforward and emphasize what you want to happen. Specifics help us to focus our efforts and clearly define what we are going to do. To set a specific goal, answer the following questions:

- Who is involved?
- What do I want to accomplish?
- What is the location?
- What is the time frame?
- Are there specific requirements and constraints?
- What are the specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal?

For example, a general goal would be "buy more green products," whereas a specific goal would be "establish a purchasing policy that requires vendors to identify green alternatives for all RFPs.

Measurable goals

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Choose a goal with metrics that you can measure in order to monitor progress. Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal. When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement.

To determine if your goal is measurable, ask questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

For example, "replace DEHP wherever possible" is not as readily measurable as "convert all tubing and solutions bags in NICU to non-DEHP by June 1."

Attainable goals

When you identify goals that are most important to you and other key stakeholders, you begin to figure out ways your organization can reach them. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills and financial capacity and begin seeing previously overlooked opportunities to bring yourself closer to the achievement of your goals. You probably won't truly commit to goals that are too far out of your reach. However, setting big, audacious goals for some topics, while challenging, can drive more innovation and lead to success not imagined when you start.

Plan your steps wisely and establish a time frame that allows you to carry out those steps. Remember that a goal needs to stretch you slightly.

For example, if you have no support for reusable sharps containers, the goal "convert to reusable sharps containers throughout the facility in the next six months" may be unattainable. It may be better to commit to "run a six-month pilot on reusable sharps containers in XX and YY departments beginning May 1."

Realistic goals

Realistic is not a synonym for easy, but rather doable. To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both willing and able to work. Be sure that every goal represents substantial progress, that you have set the bar high enough for a satisfying achievement. Your goal is probably realistic if you truly believe your organization can accomplish it. Devise a plan or a way of getting there that makes the goal realistic.

Timely and tangible goals

Ground a goal within a time frame. If you don't set a time, the commitment is too vague. It tends not to happen because you feel you can start at any time and there is no sense of urgency.

If you want to increase recycling by 25 percent, by what date do you want to do that? "Someday" won't work. But if you anchor it within a time frame, "by May 1", then you've set the organization into motion to achieve the goal.

A goal is tangible when you can experience it with one of the senses — taste, touch, smell, sight or hearing. When your goal is tangible, you have a better chance of making it specific and measurable and thus attainable.

How to attain your goals

Once you have established several SMART goals for your team, here are some steps to take to ensure you attain your goals:

1. Write them down. Putting your goals on paper confirms your willingness to make them come true. A written list of goals is an effective reminder of what you need to do and once you're done, a good review of your accomplishment.
2. Choose the initial goal or goals you will work on. Start small so you and the organization see success.
3. Break each chosen goal into small increments, complete with time, dates, amount and some details.
4. Create ownership by defining who on the team will do what and by when. Brainstorm tactics on how the organization will accomplish the goal.
5. Establish regularly scheduled updates on the progress at green team meetings and to leadership and review metrics.
6. Make a habit out of the actions you must take to achieve these goals.

Patient safety and the environment

Patient safety is one of the first barriers that may be placed along your environmental path, with staff or others raising concern, for example, about the infection control abilities of a green cleaning product. While infection risks are of paramount importance in health care settings, many green products and processes have little or no impact on infection control. In fact, many reduce the toxins in our environment, improve indoor air quality, reduce staff injury and improve staff and patient well-being.

What you can do

Be clear that patient safety comes first

In all your discussions and communications with staff, patients, the public and your vendors, be clear that patient safety comes first. Articulate your desire for the greenest product or process possible that still provides the same (or better) level of patient or staff safety and the same level of infection control.

Start by introducing alternatives that have no infection control impact

Start by addressing resource-intensive practices and toxic or irritating chemicals that you can replace with green alternatives without affecting infection transmission. Some examples include:

- Replace the floor strippers and finishes that contain heavy metals and asthmagens. Substitute low-VOC (volatile organic compound) glass cleaners.
- Use 100% recycled paper products.
- Employ carcinogen-free carpet cleaners.
- Adopt general purpose cleaners with no hormone-disrupting ingredients.
- Introduce high-filtration vacuums and water- and chemical-conserving floor maintenance equipment.

None of these products or practices is linked to infection transmission or infection control, and all can improve worker safety and reduce environmental impacts.

Use staff safety to your advantage

Processes or products that are safer for the environment are often safer for patients and staff too, and you can use this fact to your advantage. Work with the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, for example, to introduce less-toxic disinfectants, reusable sharps containers (which are emptied by third-party personnel) or microfiber mops that conserve water, use less chemicals and reduce rotator cuff injuries. Carpets, paints and furniture that have less off-gassing improve indoor air quality, another advantage for staff and patient safety.

Choose registered products

Green disinfectants must be effective against whatever organisms the infection control department requires, and if the product is registered with the Environmental Protection Agency you can have confidence that it is effective. After that, look for alternatives that further reduce health and environmental impacts. Some examples include using chemicals with a more neutral pH to reduce the potential for eye and skin irritation, choosing alternatives with no or low VOCs and no or low fragrance to reduce the potential for respiratory irritation, and using products that are more highly concentrated to further reduce the impacts from packaging.

Not all areas require the same chemicals

You can reduce the use of toxins by establishing a process of using only what is needed. Many carry out numerous current practices for perceived rather than actual risks. For example, many hospitals respond to high infection rates by using disinfectants in almost every area, and on almost every surface. Yet, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is no epidemiological evidence that supports over disinfection. Introduce a process to:

- Use disinfectant only where needed (such as in patient rooms and exam rooms) and not in areas where it is not necessary (such as file rooms and administrative areas)
- Use a disinfectant product that has the greenest profile and still has the necessary kill claims. For example, older phenolic cleaners tend to have more hazardous ingredients compared to quaternary ammonium-based products.

Work with the infection control team

Make sure your infection control team is part of any process to either pilot or implement a new green product or process. If the infection control team does not sit on the green team, ensure there is regular communication with it and that you ask for its input and feedback.

Use pilots to introduce and test new products or procedures

Sometimes pilots are the way to go because they allow people to test a new product or method. Pilots allow time to air and test any concerns, and often provide internal champions who will help with the facility wide rollout if the pilot is a success. You'll need to:

1. Identify where to implement the pilot. It may include more than one area if you are testing applicability to different environments.
2. Determine your evaluation criteria. Do you simply want general feedback, a bacterial swipe test or a detailed assessment? Keep in mind the extra work this creates for staff.
3. If you are introducing a new product that requires a new process, then consider how the two may interact and how you can control for one aspect of the program when evaluating another.
4. Develop pre- and post-implementation surveys for staff, patients and visitors.

5. Determine how you will solicit ongoing feedback during the pilot. A suggestion box? Poster with an email address? Will you interview staff and patients about their response to the changes in the area?
6. Determine who will be responsible for fielding suggestions or complaints, and how the team will address them.

7. Determine your timeframe for implementation and assessment. Make sure it is long enough to allow people to become accustomed to any changes.

The Vizient Environmentally Preferred Sourcing (EPS) Program offers members supply and service cost savings through more than 36,000 supplier agreements. EPS suppliers have verified EPS attributes and provide products that can support members' sustainability objectives. This toolkit is a resource to help members create or enhance their sustainability programs.

As the nation's largest member-driven health care performance improvement company, Vizient provides network-powered insights in the critical areas of clinical, operational, and supply chain performance and empowers members to deliver exceptional, cost-effective care.



To learn more, contact us at eps@vizientinc.com.