

SFP ACTION PLANNING

Turning vision into reality



Written by Sarah Davies, Food Matters

February 2020

Contents

1 Introduction	3
2. Planning Framework and Structure	3
2.1 Theory of Change.....	4
3. Getting Started	4
4. Getting Organised	5
4.1 Themed working groups	5
4.2 Working group leads and contributors	5
4.3 Physical or virtual meeting and consultation	5
4.4 Planning template.....	5
5. Prioritisation	6
5.1 Build on what already exists	6
5.2 Don't try to do it all in one go	6
5.3 Pick the low-hanging fruit	6
5.4 Evidence of impact	6
5.5 Resource implications	6
6. Consult	7
7. Adopt and Use the Action Plan	7
7.1 Scrutiny	7
7.2 Progress.....	7
7.3 Communicate	7
7.4 Review	8
7.5 Refresh	8
Appendix 1	9
Applied Action Planning Framework.....	9
Appendix 2:	10
Action Planning Template.....	10

1 Introduction

Action planning is the process of planning what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, by whom and with what resources. Your written action plan should state the changes that you want to make, the steps you will take to make these changes, who will be involved, when they will do it and with what resources. This short guide will help you to structure your approach to creating your action plan and ensure that it is the outcome of a strong process of stakeholder engagement.

2. Planning Framework and Structure

Action planning can't take place in a vacuum. It needs to be located within a strategic framework to help you structure and organise what you are doing. Without a strategic framework you won't know where you are going or why you are going there. If action planning happens outside of a strategic framework, it can be a bit hit and miss. You may do something useful or you may not!

Whilst there is some discrepancy in how different dimensions are defined, the basic framework is as shown below:

VISION

- What is the overarching vision that you are contributing to?
- What are you working towards?

Achieving the AIMS or delivering the OUTCOMES contributes to realisation of the VISION

AIMS or OUTCOMES

- What do you want to achieve in addressing specific issues?
- What will be delivered through your effort?
- Where do you want to get to for each of the issues/themes?
- What are the end points of your work against the issues/themes?

Meeting the OBJECTIVES contributes to achievement of the AIMS / delivering OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES

- What targets need to be hit in order to achieve the aims / deliver outcomes?
- What objectives need to be met to contribute to achieving the aim?
- What needs to be in place in terms of processes, structures, capacity etc.?

Carrying out the ACTIONS leads to meeting the OBJECTIVES / hitting the targets

ACTIONS or ACTIVITIES

- What needs to be done to meet the objectives?
- Who needs to do what?
- What practical steps need to be taken?

ISSUES

- What are the issues that you are trying to address?
- What are the challenges and problems that you aim to address and that you want to deliver a response to?

Addressing the ISSUES is the purpose of carrying out the ACTIONS, meeting the OBJECTIVES, achieving the AIMS and realising the VISION

For a clearly worked example of what this might look like in practice have a look at **Appendix 1**.

2.1 Theory of Change

As well as action planning, some people find it useful to frame their work with a theory of change. This is a diagram and explanation that describes how you think the change you are trying to bring about will happen. It describes what you do, why you do it, the impact you aim to have and how you intend to have that impact. Your statement of the issue or problem that you are trying to solve is placed up front and the actions that you are going to take along with key assumptions are examined at every step, along with identification of indicators of success. This can be a useful way of focusing your work on your long-term goal and is particularly helpful for monitoring and evaluating your work. See this [Theory of Change Guide](#) by NESTA for further detail on the approach along with examples and tips.

3. Getting Started

How you go about getting started with action planning will partly be determined by where you have already got to.

If you don't yet have a clear vision and set of aims or outcomes for your food partnership, then you will need to start with strategic thinking and visioning. Engaging a wide range of local stakeholders in the visioning process will enable you to establish a planning framework that is specific to your place. It will also generate a strong sense of ownership of the framework which is important.

If you have a wide group of stakeholders to engage, then you might want to consider holding a 'summit' type event. If the visioning is taking place with a smaller steering group then it could take the form of a workshop instead.

The main purpose of the visioning event is to:

- determine what it's all about
- identify issues and themed work areas
- explore what's already going on where and by whom
- begin to identify working groups and lead organisations

The SFP Network team have found it useful to frame these events around a series of questions. See our [Food Summit](#) tool for further guidance.

Note: if the planning framework is determined by a representative group, it will need to be confirmed or verified by a wider consultation. This will also encourage and enable wider participation and ownership.

4. Getting Organised

Once you have a vision and a set of aims or outcomes in place, it is time to move on to the more detailed work of action planning. This is the point at which you start to pin down the specific actions that people are going to commit to in order to achieve your aims or outcomes.

4.1 Themed working groups

A good way to make progress with this detailed stage of action planning in a participatory way is to use working groups. You might want to organise these along the lines of the main issues you want to address in your food partnership (E.g. climate and nature emergency, food poverty and diet related ill-health etc.). Alternatively you could use each aim or outcome as the basis for a working group. Their main purpose is to work out clear objectives and specific actions that will help achieve each aim or outcome.

4.2 Working group leads and contributors

You might find it helpful to identify a lead person for each theme. This could be a time limited role, just for the duration of the action planning phase. Their role will be to host action planning working groups for their theme, write up and circulate draft actions to all participants, organise further fact finding meetings if necessary and lead on the drafting of the theme action plan.

You have probably already gathered potential participants from previous food partnership events held at the visioning stage, or know the key people who are directly involved in the issue. You might also want to invite people with specific expertise to contribute to the action planning stage.

4.3 Physical or virtual meeting and consultation

Most working groups get together for an action planning workshop. Have a look at our [Action Planning Workshop](#) tool for an example of a format. However, if resources are tight, a lot can be achieved online by sharing action plan templates using a programme such as Google Docs. This way all contributors can edit the document in real time and build up the draft action plan this way. Perhaps a combination of a physical meet up followed up by further consultation online is the most productive approach.

4.4 Planning template

If there are a number of action planning working groups taking place, it might be helpful to use an action plan template as a basic model for building up your action plan. This will ensure consistency of approach. You may want to use a template like that shown in Appendix 2 and to brief working group leads on its use. It will be important to document the action planning process showing clearly how the detailed actions relate back to the overall vision and purpose of the food partnership. All of this is based on the action planning framework outlined in section 2.

5. Prioritisation

Given the breadth of the sustainable food agenda and the wide range of stakeholders engaged, it is easy to get overwhelmed by the number of possible objectives and actions. It can be a challenge to know where to start, what to include, and what to prioritise.

5.1 Build on what already exists

You don't need to start with a blank sheet of paper. It is likely that there will already be a great deal happening in your area that contributes to your aims or outcomes. Capturing current activity and already planned activity can be a good place to start.

5.2 Don't try to do it all in one go

Try to be realistic about what can be achieved. You may want to prioritise early activity of your partnership on a couple of themes and cover the other areas with a lighter touch approach. Of course shifting food culture is going to require some pretty big changes in all areas, but it is not going to happen overnight. Some food partnerships have deliberately made their first action plan relatively easy to achieve and not too politically challenging. Once momentum has built, you can move on to tackling more challenging areas.

5.3 Pick the low-hanging fruit

Some actions can be easily achieved and will enable your partnership to build positive momentum as it begins its journey. You may find actions that deliver on more than one objective and that have wide political support are a good place to start. There may be actions which are cost neutral, or which are income generating or which tie in with existing local priorities. These are a good place to start.

5.4 Evidence of impact

Use our [Making the Case](#) document to build up a picture of approaches that are effective in tackling your outcomes or aims. The document lists extensive case studies and academic articles that demonstrate the effectiveness of your approach. If there is limited evidence for the effectiveness of an action, this could be a reason to make it less of a priority.

5.5 Resource implications

Consider carefully what money, time and other resources are going to be needed to achieve your actions. We suggest having a column in your action plan for 'resources required'. If your actions are very resource intensive and there is little prospect of raising the funds or finding people with the time to implement them, then these may need to be reconsidered. Look instead for actions that can be achieved within existing resources.

6. Consult

Once draft action plans have been developed for each theme it is helpful to consult on them with the wider partnership. This could simply be done by circulating the overall draft action plan for comment. Alternatively, some food partnerships have found it useful to organise a consultation event which brings together membership from across the partnership to further discuss and prioritise actions. Whichever approach you decide, what is important is that the action plan is the result of a participative process that reflects, as far as possible, the priorities of the whole partnership.

7. Adopt and Use the Action Plan

If there has been a strong participatory process with a wide range of stakeholders, hopefully they are ready to adopt the action plan and put it into practice. Here are some ways you might want to make use of your action plan.

7.1 Scrutiny

Use your action plan to scrutinise new opportunities. Ask yourselves; is the opportunity in keeping with the vision / aims and objectives? Does the opportunity contribute to delivery of the action plan? Use it in this way as a tool for keeping your food partnership on track. You may also want to consider whether proposals by stakeholders support the delivery of the action plan or whether they undermine it?

7.2 Progress

A key reason for having an action plan is to be able to measure and monitor progress towards achieving your vision. Have a regular slot on the food partnership steering group agenda for members to report progress against actions. Make sure that timelines (with due dates) are complete, clear and current.

Are you achieving what you set out to do? If not, ask why? Are there changes you could make to get back on track? Or were you too ambitious with your objectives? Are there external factors that have changed and made achieving your aims more difficult?

Check your food partnership's core functions. Is it fit for purpose to deliver the proposed action plan? Does it need strengthening? Do interests of stakeholders need balancing?

If you are making good progress, then use the action plan to communicate this good news story and celebrate the accomplishment of tasks.

7.3 Communicate

Use your action planning framework as a way of communicating your food partnerships purpose to others. Who needs to know about your vision / aims / objectives and proposed actions? You may want to communicate to different audiences in different ways using a variety of formats:

- action plan
- strategy
- charter
- terms of reference

All of these will be based on the action planning framework laid out at the start.

7.4 Review

An action plan is always a work in progress. Keep it visible, use it and review it regularly. Ask yourself: Are we doing what we said we would? Are we doing it well? Is what we are doing advancing our vision for the food system?

7.5 Refresh

It is not usually a good idea to do detailed action planning for more than a year in advance. Changes in context, in strategy, in assumptions may require changes in what you do in the longer term. Whilst your vision, aims or outcomes may stand the test of time, objectives and actions may need regular refresh.

Appendix 1

Applied Action Planning Framework

Sustainable Fish Campaign

VISION	A sustainable global fishery	Overarching aim – ultimately where we want to get to
OUTCOME	People consume sustainably caught fish	A state or position which is reached in order that the VISION is achieved
	OUTCOME INDICATOR – Increase in the number of people consuming sustainable caught fish.	<i>Measuring this shows that the activities are having an impact.</i>
OBJECTIVE	Procurement policy for an organization is changed to include only sustainably caught fish	Objective that needs to be met or a change that happens for the OUTCOME to be delivered
ACTIVITY	Meet with and discuss the campaign issues with the Head of Procurement	An action that is carried out or a step that is taken for the OBJECTIVE to be delivered.

Appendix 2:

Action Planning Template

Objective:			
Activities	Time frame	Who is responsible	Resources required