

Steady Decisions in Shifting Terrain: Strategies for CACs and State Chapters

Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and State Chapters often operate in environments defined by continuous change—new funding realities, emerging priorities, and ever-shifting partnerships. Amid that constant movement, leaders are often tasked with making decisions that carry both immediate impact and long-term implications. Previous Roundup articles have focused on change management, and are excellent companion reads, but this one focuses on the decision-making process that may precede or accompany major change for organizations. This Roundup highlights practical tools and strategies to help CACs and Chapters make thoughtful, mission-aligned decisions amid competing priorities. Below are some of our go-to practices for weighing options, and some of the ways WRCAC supports CACs and State Chapters through making pivotal decisions.

Start with Your Mission and Values

The mission and values outlined in your organizational strategic plan are critical lenses for your organization's decision-making in pivotal moments. The mission is a great filter for what work does or does not belong to an organization. Many CACs and Chapters will, for example, receive a well-intentioned suggestion for a project that “helps kids,” but falls outside their mission's scope. It's hard enough to turn down an otherwise great idea that falls outside your mission but becomes exponentially more challenging when doing so also means passing up new funding or other resources tied to the pitch. However, remaining disciplined to stay true to your organization's mission, making sure the full CAC response is there when children need it, prevents your core work from being watered down or replaced by priorities that don't belong to your mission.

While revisiting your organization's mission helps it remain committed to *what* it does when facing a big decision, revisiting the values helps it stay aligned with *how* it approaches that work. Standing firmly within the guardrails of your organization's mission and values, you can next lean into facilitation tools like those below to sort through the options that fit within them before making a big decision.

Open Your Facilitation Toolbox

Using facilitative frameworks can maximize your organization's ability to review options, effectively digest and weigh details, and make a decision aligned with its mission and values. Below are some commonly used models and tools, listed from least to most complex, along with resources for further exploration:

- **Eisenhower Matrix** – Best for identifying options that are timely and/or “low hanging fruit,” this four-quadrant tool helps groups organize possibilities by their urgency

versus their importance to the mission or, sometimes, effort to impact. Plotting out different ideas in each quadrant, those that are both urgent and important (or low effort for high impact) are more easily identified as the items needing the most prioritization.

- [Eisenhower Matrix.pdf](#)
- [Impact vs. Effort Matrix – Participatory Methods](#)
- **Stoplight Color-Coding** – As a lightweight option, ideal when capacity is limited, this model uses “stoplight colors” to contextualize the desirability of specific factors across different option. Unlike the Eisenhower Matrix, this method can handle multiple factors at once and account for context—where ‘high’ might be good in one column (e.g., high mission impact = green) but undesirable in another (e.g., high cost = red). That makes this an especially effective tool when weighing multiple options’ merits across factors such as cost, mission impact, required staff capacity, required partnership engagement, and stakeholder interest. Consider the generalized example below:

Possible Projects				
	Cost	Mission Impact	Initial Staffing Needs	Ongoing Staffing Needs
Project A	Low	Moderate	High	Low
Project B	High	High	Low	Low

Project A may be the best option for an organization with numerous skilled staff but no extra funding, whereas Project B may be more appealing to an organization with limited staff capacity but an unexpected one-time windfall of funding. With this and any real-world application, the evaluation may reveal that none of the options on the table are the most strategic choice at any given time. Consider that declining a project, or “continue as normal,” may in itself be both part of the equation and the appropriate decision.

When applied to decision-making, the intuitive colors of this model condense information into something more digestible, making it easier for an organization to identify the option best aligned with its strategic plan and operational realities.

- **SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)** – Although SWOT analyses can be used more broadly, even in evaluating an entire organization, in the context of decision-making tools this is best used when exploring the viability of a single option. Weighing internal capacity and external factors, this exercise

helps a group go into a decision with “eyes wide open” and fine-tuned details to make the best of the decision at hand before it’s put into motion.

- [How to Perform a Nonprofit SWOT Analysis \(Downloadable Template\)](#)
- **Scenario Planning Framework** – This model is best used as a “crystal ball” when preparing for future decisions that may have to be made in times of uncertainty in an organization’s environment. Modeling best to worst case scenarios for those possible changes, this process helps organizations prepare to make strategic decisions within a range of possibilities. Scenario planning is especially helpful when considering possible changes in external factors like funding, and can even help the organization identify “trigger points” ahead of time at which it will put various decisions into action.
 - [scenario-planning-toolkit-editable-2023.pdf](#)

Make a Decision

A perfect option that’ll produce perfect results is almost unheard of, but even an imperfect but well-considered and mission-aligned decision can lead to meaningful progress for the children and families you serve.

We’re Here to Help

For programs in the Western Region, there are many arenas in which WRCAC can support Chapters and CACs through complex or challenging decision-making processes. Chapter leaders have access to executive coaching, which may focus on problem-solving with some of these tools in pivotal and challenging moments for the organization and its leadership. These methods may also be applied to groups through WRCAC-facilitated strategic planning in partnership with a state’s Chapter and its board of directors (or equivalent advisory partners) to chart a course for increasing statewide capacity to support the work of CACs and MDTs. WRCAC is also available, usually upon a Chapter’s request, to support individual CACs navigate through decision-making and change management during times of pivotal change in their organizations or community.

Whether your organization is weighing new initiatives, navigating a funding shift, or regrouping after a disruption, WRCAC is here to help. For more information, please reach out to Caitlin (csmith11@rchsd.org).