

Santa Cruz County Operational Plan: Putting Strategy into Action and Measuring Results

Overview – The Santa Cruz County Operational Plan and online dashboard represent a transparent and results-based approach to financial and policy planning.

Challenge – Facing an increasing demand on services, limited funding and community concerns about housing, homelessness, behavioral health services and numerous other issues, the Board of Supervisors and County Administrative Officer recognized a need to establish a plan to help guide future spending and policy decisions.

Solution – Over the last two years, the County implemented a detailed two-year Operational Plan, the first of three under the six-year County Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan and Operational Plan are completely integrated, giving the County a solid foundation for encouraging and measuring progress at the department level. The integration is not only vertical but horizontal, so that other County processes such as Board agenda items are linked to Strategic Plan goals by identifying which goal is met by the item going before the Board. The Operational Plan is a living document, and County successes and challenges are transparent. The County tracks progress on each objective through an interactive online dashboard, which is refreshed twice each year in December and June.

County programs and policies, many of which are outlined in the Operational Plan, contribute towards achieving the community-level impact we want to see. The key difference is the level of control the County has over its programs and policies is much greater. The County follows a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework, which is used by organizations to improve program performance and by communities to improve quality of life. RBA asks four basic questions of department programs and policies:

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Did we make a difference?
- Is anyone better off?

The County has provided training to over 250 staff on the RBA framework, focusing on creating better measures through establishing clear baselines, setting realistic targets, and building in data disaggregation to be able to better target program adjustments based on client needs.

On June 30, 2021, the first two-year Operational Plan came to an end. During Fiscal Years 2019-21, the County completed 134 (74%) of the 180 SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timebound) objectives, amended 34 (19%), and withdrew 12 (7%) due to budget and resource constraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and CZU fires as well as shifting priorities and programs. The second two-year Operational Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-23 is an opportunity to document what the County intends to do as we emerge from these emergencies. In developing new objectives, departments are focused on improving measurement and performance indicators, in particular measurement of disparities that impact equity.

The 2021-23 plan puts forward 80 objectives across the embed equity across multiple lenses including race/ethnicity, geography, ability, gender, and age. It represents the County's first step, at an institutional level, to address the persistent public health crisis faced by communities of color, and outlines several opportunities where the County will be embracing this work and creating space for new, diverse voices to be heard.

The County is also tracking 25 population indicators to determine if it has achieved the vision, mission and goals set forth in the 2018-24 Strategic Plan. A total of 16 of the 25 indicators are currently being tracked through the County's partnership with DataShare Santa Cruz County (DataShare SCC), and staff are working to include the remaining seven indicators on the DataShare SCC website.

Results – The Operational Plan has been favorably received by the public, staff, community stakeholders and the Board. With the first plan complete and a second plan underway, the public is able to monitor progress and track results on each of the County's objectives through a publicly available and interactive dashboard.

Replicability – The County's operational planning process is highly replicable and scalable. Our program design is transparent with a guide available online.

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Additional Materials – Links to the online dashboard, guide and indicators are provided below:

<https://www.santacruzcounty.us/VisionSantaCruz/OperationalPlan.aspx>

<https://www.santacruzcounty.us/VisionSantaCruz/OperationalPlan/OperationalPlanGuide.aspx>

<https://www.datasharescc.org/tiles/index/display?alias=CountyStrategicPlan>