

NIH Common Template for Strategic Plans

In 2016, Congress stipulated that NIH Institute and Center strategic plans follow a common template.¹ In response, NIH developed the first *NIH Common Template for Strategic Plans*, which was based on the Framework of the [NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for FY 2016-2020](#) and approved for use with strategic plans issued after January 1, 2019. NIH released the [NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for FY 2021-2025](#) on July 31, 2021, and the Common Template was updated and released on July 19, 2023. The Common Template mirrors the NIH-Wide Strategic Plan, which helps to **harmonize** strategic planning across NIH.

The Common Template outlines content to be covered by Institute and Center strategic plans, including:

- **Front Matter:** Here, the Institute or Center provides a Director’s Message and table of contents to help readers navigate through the plan.
- **Overview or Introduction:** Here, the Institute or Center introduces their mission and goals. This section will also typically describe the organization of the plan, the organization and founding of the Institute or Center, and the Institute or Center’s approach to strategic planning, including priority setting, development of the strategic plan, and plan implementation.
- **Strategic Priorities:** Here, the Institute or Center sets out its research, capacity, and operational priorities, and approach to addressing these priorities, for the duration of the plan.² New initiatives are outlined and accomplishments under the previous plan may be described. The Institute or Center may also include crosscutting themes, or common approaches across the priorities in the plan.
 - **Research Priorities:** For biomedical, behavioral, and social sciences research.
 - **Capacity Priorities:** For building and maintaining scientific capacity, including workforce, resources, and infrastructure.
 - **Operational Priorities:** Toward being an efficient and effective steward of the public resources under its purview.
- **Appendices:** Here, the Institute or Center describes the strategic planning process and timeline followed, including how input was sought from internal and external community members and incorporated into the plan. This section may also include a list of all acronyms used.

There are several benefits to using the Common Template, including: **alignment** between Institute and Center strategic plans and the NIH-Wide Strategic Plan; **consistency and clarity** across Institute and Center strategic plans; and reinforcement of **best practices** for development of strategic plans by requiring specific content.

¹ Section 402(m) of the *Public Health Service (PHS) Act*, as amended by the *21st Century Cures Act*, requires that strategic plans developed and updated by the Institutes and Centers of the NIH are prepared regularly, are informed by the NIH-Wide Strategic Plan, and shall have a Common Template

² Narratives in this section of the template must also address the *21st Century Cures Act* Institute and Center strategic planning requirement (42 USC 289a-2(a)(3)) to ensure that future activities related to clinical research by the Institutes and Centers consider women and minorities and are focused on reducing health disparities.