

SMART Recovery: Strategic Planning

A Case Study

SMART Recovery is the world's largest and fastest-growing network of mutual support groups that use science and self-empowerment to help people overcome addictions. Tens of thousands of people gather weekly at 3,500 meetings in over 20 countries and 700 meetings online. SMART Recovery USA—a nonprofit organization—was founded in 1994, and with the organization's global growth, a new entity known as SMART Recovery International was created in 2018.

SMART reached out to C4 Innovations (C4) due to its experience and expertise in working with organizations focused on recovery supports. Between December 2018 and July 2019, C4 provided technical assistance to SMART centered on:

- Increasing the organization's understanding of the needs of its volunteer meeting facilitators
- Exploring options for sustainable, continued growth

C4 proposed several recommendations to advance SMART's goals of improving volunteer retention and fostering organizational sustainability. Three months later, the SMART leadership team wanted to leverage this work and subsequent recommendations as a springboard to develop a new strategic plan. Again, they contacted C4 to facilitate a strategic planning process to:

- Design best practices for volunteer management
- Develop a fundraising strategy
- Create a comprehensive action plan which resulted in:
 - Adoption of a new strategic plan and establishment of teams to drive each initiative
 - Plans to cultivate a more diverse board of directors



C4 facilitated a comprehensive and rigorous investigation that helped us identify our most critical strategic issues at an inflection point in the growth of our organization. They guided our development of a new strategic plan to resolve these issues and set goals, objectives, and action steps to implement it, along with metrics to measure progress. In other words, we learned not only what we need to do going forward, but also how to do it.

—Bill Greer, Board President,
SMART Recovery USA

The Challenge

In response to its growth, SMART needed additional trained facilitators to keep pace with the demand for more meetings and resources to maintain quality control. SMART relies on an ever-growing number of volunteers to educate their communities, facilitate meetings, and contribute to organizational learning. Volunteer regional coordinators serve as central points of contact and offer ongoing support to meeting facilitators in each region. Additionally, SMART's online services—weekly meetings, training for thousands of facilitators a year, podcasts, message boards, chat rooms, and a library of educational resources—require ongoing upgrades and strategic information technology (IT) planning. More staff were needed to support the growing service demands. After three different people moved in and out of the role of executive director in 2018, SMART's leadership recognized they needed to develop a plan for sustainable growth with governance controls to guide the organization effectively.

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Strategic Planning Process

PROJECT GUIDANCE: SMART wanted input from its key stakeholders into the strategic planning process. SMART identified the board president, two other board members, executive director, two National Office staff members, four regional coordinators, and two providers for a Strategic Planning Workgroup to serve as a conduit for information and to guide the process.

DATA COLLECTION: C4 recommended conducting a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) analysis—a strengths-based assessment tool—with various stakeholders to gather input on SMART and strategic directions. Beginning in February 2020, SMART and C4 conducted SOAR assessments with four different groups: Strategic Planning Workgroup, Volunteer Regional Coordinators, Board of Directors, and National Office staff. All the SOAR assessments were reviewed by C4, and major themes were identified and then grouped together under the major headings of Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results.

SMART asked C4 to review the 2019 SMART Board of Directors self-assessment survey results and the 2019 Volunteer Survey. SMART also identified 13 key stakeholders for 75 minute in-depth interviews. C4 drafted an interview tool using the SOAR framework, and with input from SMART, finalized the tool and conducted 13 individual virtual interviews during April 2020. C4 analyzed and collated all the data inputs, identified the major themes and recommendations, and summarized the data using the SOAR framework into a final report for SMART leadership.

During this time period, SMART moved face-to-face meetings online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Working with all its volunteers and staff, SMART responded quickly and ramped up their online meeting capacity to meet the unprecedented challenge.

STRATEGIC PLANNING: Working with SMART leadership, C4 planned and facilitated a one and a half day virtual strategic planning meeting in May 2020 with 40 key stakeholders. C4 staff operated the online meeting room moving from the full group to four small breakout groups with webcams, chat boxes, and polls to ensure everyone's participation. To begin, C4 facilitated small and large group discussions on the organization's values, vision, and mission. The participants reaffirmed SMART's vision and mission. With this foundation, C4 presented the analyzed data.

SMART's stakeholders identified several specific challenges for the organization. Facilitator training and retention was overwhelmingly cited as a critical barrier to meeting expansion. Stakeholders reported that generational gaps combined with the lack of racial and cultural diversity in national staff and board of directors limited the range of ideas coming from leadership. They suggested this impacted SMART's ability to reach underserved populations and address the needs of diverse volunteers and meeting participants. They also identified differentiating and expanding funding streams as vital for organizational stability. Through facilitated exploration of the data, SMART stakeholders identified several points of disagreement and longstanding differences regarding goals for the organization. C4 supported SMART stakeholders in engaging in tough conversations about the challenges they faced in their work and their community. C4 also helped them reach agreements grounded in their shared commitment to SMART and a shared vision of ensuring access for all to SMART's science-based self-empowering recovery supports.



Results

SMART's Board of Directors met in June 2020, adopted the strategic plan and created a team comprised of board members, staff, and volunteers with a chair and co-chair to drive each strategic initiative in the plan. The Financial Stability team drafted a workplan and began implementation and the Organizational Culture team recruited people of color to their workgroup. The Recovery Support and Volunteer Management workgroup is exploring how to redesign training programs to generate more facilitators with the skills to run meetings more effectively. The Marketing workgroup is developing plans to improve internal communications and external outreach to treatment professionals and members of the broader medical community. This workgroup also plans to gauge the level of awareness of SMART among professionals and the general public to track the progress of initiatives to increase awareness.

SMART's commitment to their new strategic plan was clearly demonstrated at the July board meeting. The board voted to wait on bringing on new board members until they have taken several of the steps outlined in their plan to cultivate a more diverse board. With its new strategic plan, SMART Recovery has a clear, agreed upon roadmap to move forward together to empower people to achieve independence from addiction challenges.

More Information

For more information on how C4 supports agencies and programs in strategic planning and other organizational development challenges, email training@c4innovates.com and visit c4innovates.com/organizationaldevelopment. Follow C4 on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#). Visit SMART Recovery at smartrecovery.org.

From the data analysis, stakeholders identified eight strategic initiatives. Working together, participants prioritized the top four strategic initiatives: financial stability, recovery support meetings and volunteer management, marketing, and developing an organizational culture that promotes equity and advances SMART values. With C4 facilitators, participants created bold yet doable goals and objectives for each strategic initiative. For example, SMART identified goals to create a fund development culture within their organization; diversify their board, staff and volunteer base by recruiting people of color, women, and young people; and develop a mentoring program to support and sustain regional volunteers.

C4 drafted a strategic plan with goals for each strategic initiative as well as objectives, timelines, action steps, evaluation metrics, and person(s) responsible. C4 included volunteer retention strategies and fund development best practices with numerous resources within the plan for easy retrieval. C4 also created a Gantt chart representing the two year plan timeline graphically. Finally, C4 provided several dashboard templates and recommended using the strategic plan as a living document with quarterly progress updates written into the plan for board review.