



Strategic Planning Prioritization Guide

You are engaging in a strategic planning process and may be gaining confidence in a strategic direction to guide your district for the next 3-5 years. Maybe you have identified themes, articulated concrete goals, or even created a portrait or journey of a graduate to help bring the future into focus for your team of planners. Now it is time to determine how you will act on your ideas and make decisions about the highest priority items to address first.



Why Do We Recommend Prioritization?

At this point, we often hear that teams are so excited about their new direction that they want to dig in immediately with new projects, initiatives or activities. As a long list of new items pop up, so does the need to get everyone aligned to build new processes or tools to support and document everything so that you can monitor and measure the changes. Managing too many individual initiatives quickly becomes overwhelming and/or redundant. So it becomes increasingly important to “right-size” the number of initiatives - you don’t want to take on too many things in order to ensure you execute effectively, but you also don’t want to take on too few things and risk stagnation or apathy.

How Should I Prioritize?

We recommend taking your team through a prioritization activity that will help everyone get aligned on:

1. what exactly the initiative is;
2. how it will impact your district and bring you closer to achieving your goals; and
3. how easy or difficult it will be to turn from an idea into reality.

This activity will also help shed light on which initiatives should be undertaken first, how many initiatives to tackle at once, and how to complement low- hanging fruit with multi-year change-heavy initiatives.

Note on Responsiveness: Our belief is that a strategic plan is a guiding document that can be used as a north star, and isn’t just created once but rather is able to support ongoing planning and adjustments as new learnings and needs arise. Therefore, while strategic plans are usually designed to last 3-5 years, we encourage organizations to make the highest priority with the most known information before tackling items that are one or several years down the line.

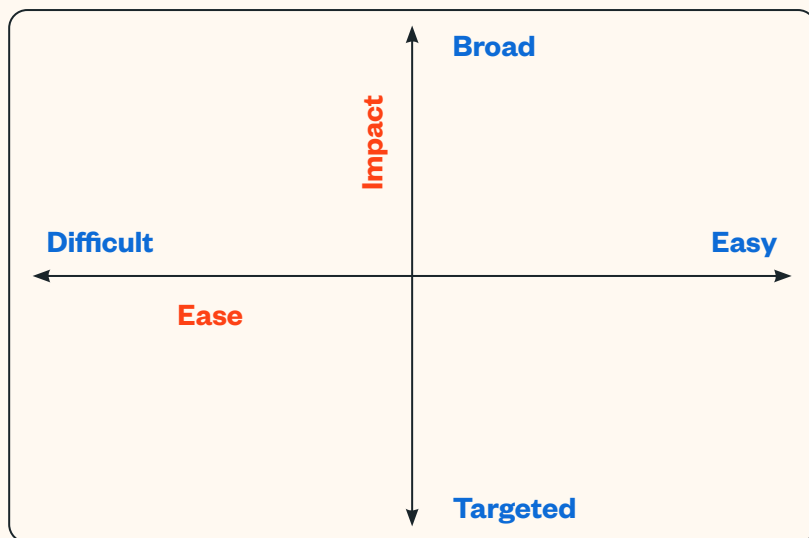
Our Framework

We encourage teams to plot new and old initiatives based on their feasibility. The descriptions below will help you understand our approach.

There are two criteria we use when determining priorities:

EASE and **IMPACT**. How you define what is easy or what has broad impact will depend on your context. Factors that inform your definition are:

- District/Organization size
- Total organization budget
- Current initiatives, systems, and structures
- Strategic planning guides: focus areas, vision, mission, or values



Determining Ease and Impact



Impact

It is common to identify all initiatives as important and high impact, but we encourage you to consider the following criteria to make your decisions more tangible.



Strategic Alignment:

How will this initiative support a variety of strategic priorities?



Student Impact:

How might this initiative directly drive outcomes with our students?



Return On Investment:

How will this initiative provide benefits beyond those directly impacted?



Flexibility:

Are we able to adjust our course with new information?

Ease

We often hold ourselves back from considering a new idea because we aren't sure how it will work. Instead of planning for failure consider the potential ease of implementation based on the following criteria.



Feasibility:

How do our existing structures support this initiative?



Risk:

How certain are we in our ability to implement this initiative?



Resource Availability + Support:

Does our staff have the capabilities necessary to accomplish this initiative?

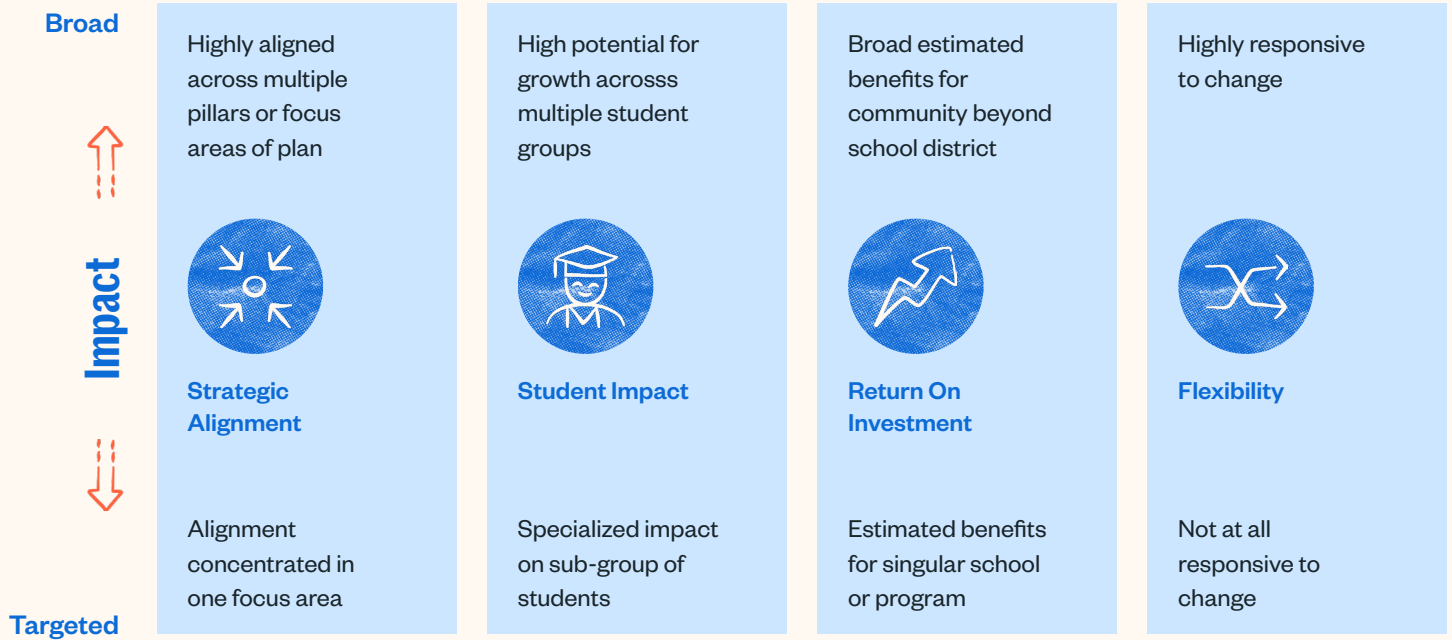


Cost:

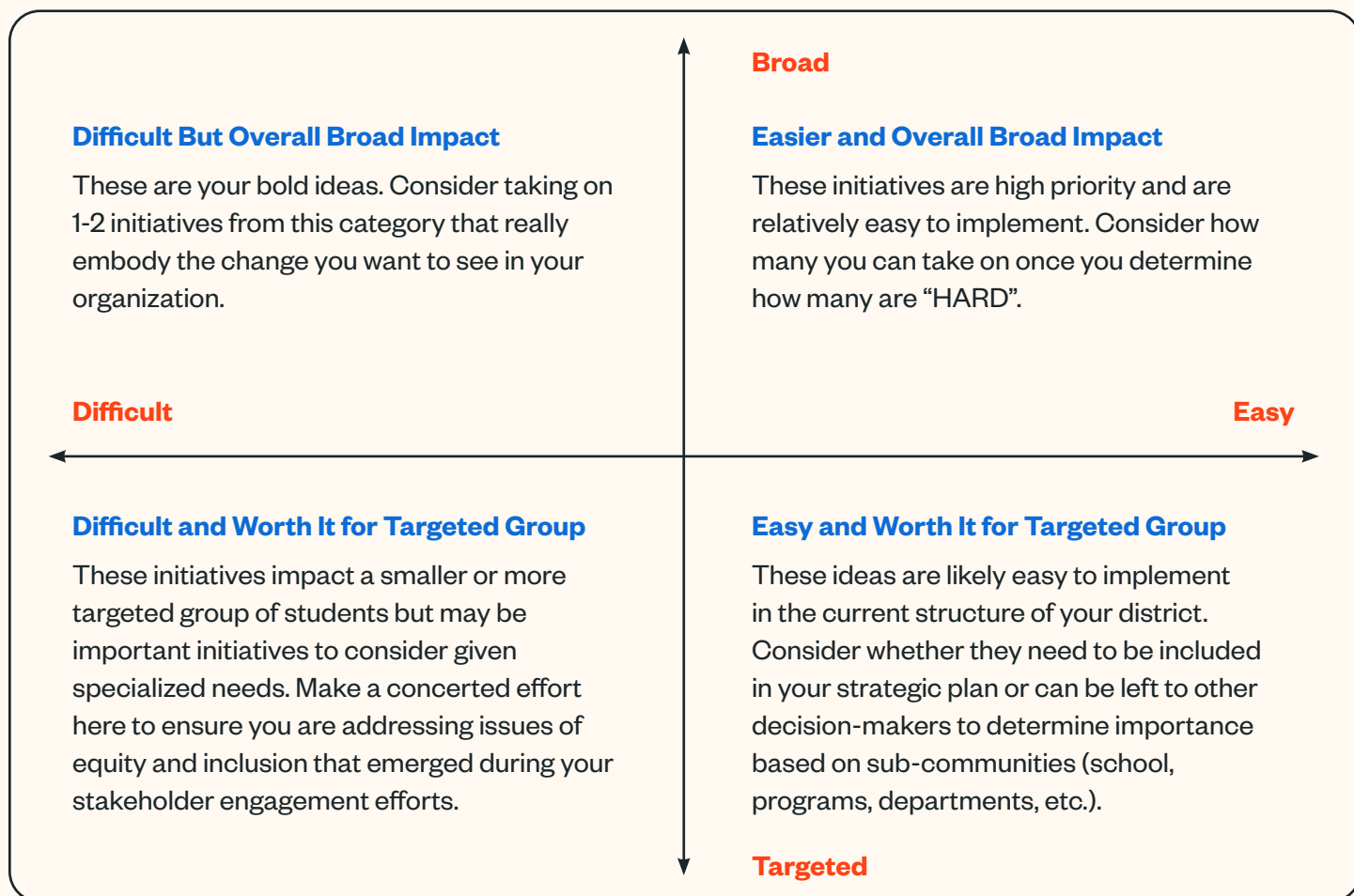
How will this initiative impact our bottom line and can we absorb the budget projections?

Evaluating Priorities

We suggest you dig deeper into the meaning of impact and ease by rating individual sub-categories. You can then average where your indicator falls within each subcategory to assess the overall level of ease and impact.



Plotting Initiatives



Next Steps

You will be tempted to plan for multiple years but we encourage you to plan for year one first. You will build in checkpoints and retrospectives along the way to guide the remaining years as new data and information come in. Once you have determined this, build out the details and get to work!

