

# Envisioning the Future of Sex Education

**A Tool Kit for States and Local Communities**



# Contents

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Overview	5
Background	5
Getting Started	6
Sample Invitation	7
Conducting the Meeting	8
Sample Agenda	9
After the Meeting	11



# Overview

This tool kit outlines a strategic planning process designed to assist state and local advocates interested in advancing comprehensive sexuality education in America's public schools. The process outlined in this tool kit is based on a two-day strategic planning meeting that was held in December 2008 as part of the Future of Sex Education (FoSE) Project and created in response to inquiries from sexuality educators and advocates to implement something similar in their state/community.

The Future of Sex Education Project began in July 2007 when staff from Advocates for Youth, Answer and SIECUS first met to discuss the future of sex education in this country. At the time, each organization was looking ahead to the possibility of a future without federal abstinence-only-until-marriage funding and simultaneously found themselves exploring the question of how best to advance comprehensive sex education in schools.

In May of 2008, Advocates, Answer and SIECUS formalized these discussions with funding from the Ford, George Gund and Grove Foundations, and the FoSE Project was launched. It was decided then that the purpose of the project would be to create a national dialogue about the future of sex education and to promote the institutionalization of comprehensive sexuality education in public schools. Public schools were specifically chosen because they represent venues at which most young people can be reached.

Subsequently, *The Future of Sex Education in America's Public Schools* report was released. This report represents the culmination of interviews and/or written comments from over 75 individuals in response to a draft document of the same name and a two-day planning meeting held in December 2008. That meeting, attended by 40 individuals from a variety of organizations and funding institutions, resulted in the foundation of a strategic framework for implementing effective sexuality education programming in public schools nationwide.

Currently, there is a lot of exciting work happening around the country in support of sex education – even in the midst of significant economic challenges. Recognizing that work at the state and local level is absolutely essential in affecting change in individual classrooms, this tool kit is aimed at helping states and local/regional organizations initiate their own strategic planning process. The process described in this tool kit can be helpful in:

1. Identifying key stakeholders (i.e., public education, public health, youth development, funding communities) and building a broader coalition of sexuality education supporters.
2. Cultivating a shared understanding and knowledge by bringing these key stakeholders together.
3. Moving efforts forward regardless of what stage a state or community is in – taking action on the heels of a policy victory, seeking to advance implementation efforts already underway or preparing to initiate sex education in their state or community for the first time.

## BACKGROUND

Sexuality education encompasses a broad umbrella of topic areas and activities for different age groups, audiences (i.e., parents, young people) and settings (i.e. churches, community-based organizations, schools). For the purposes of this tool kit, the focus is limited to Pre-K through Grade 12 public school students and all of the adults involved in providing sexuality education in this setting: school administrators, teachers, educators, parents, and others.

As such, the underlying goal on which this document is based is for every young person in public schools to have developmentally, culturally and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in Pre-K through Grade 12.

It also assumes the following definition of comprehensive sexuality education:

A planned, sequential, Pre-K – 12 curriculum that is part of a comprehensive school health approach which addresses age-appropriate physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of human sexuality. It should allow students to develop and demonstrate developmentally appropriate sexual health-related knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices. The curriculum should be designed to motivate and assist students to maintain and improve their sexual health by delaying sexual initiation, preventing disease and too-early pregnancy and reducing sexual health-related risk behaviors. The comprehensive sexuality education curriculum should include a variety of topics, including anatomy, physiology, families, personal safety, health relationships, abstinence, pregnancy and birth, sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV), contraceptives, sexual orientation, pregnancy options, medical literacy and more. It should be medically accurate, and provided by qualified, trained teachers.

# Getting Started

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To begin a strategic planning process, it is helpful to consider the current environment, how you are going to plan and implement this process to ensure maximum participation and learning, as well as the logistics of the actual strategic planning meeting and follow-up. Here are some questions to reflect on to help get started:

1. What is the current status of sexuality education in your state, community, and/or school district? What are the existing policies and practices? Are these policies and practices in alignment with one another?
2. How committed is your state or community to improving the status of comprehensive sex education in your public schools? What are the current political, economic and educational climates? What are the opportunities for/barriers to moving forward?
3. With this information in mind, what do you hope to accomplish by conducting a strategic planning session on the future of sex education in your state/community? Your answer to this question becomes the goal of your strategic planning process. For example, it could be to develop a strategic direction that will advance implementation of school-based comprehensive sexuality education in a particular school, district, region or state. It could be limited to creating a specific policy priority or to building an infrastructure to support schools and their implementation efforts. You could decide that the goal of the planning process is to increase understanding among school administrators and staff about the existing state policy and how to build their school's capacity to meet the sex education requirements.
4. Whatever the goal, be sure to be clear in advance, include the stated goal on the meeting invitation and facilitate any meetings with that goal always in mind.

Because this should be a planning effort done in coalition with other organizations, consider the following:

1. Who are the key partners that should be involved in organizing this effort? Generally, you are likely to begin with the obvious partners for whom comprehensive sexuality education is already a priority. This may include local school staff (i.e., teachers, nurses and counselors), youth-serving organizations, local or state teen pregnancy organizations or coalitions, Planned Parenthood affiliates and/or other family planning organizations, local health departments, ACLU affiliates, AIDS service organizations or other community-based

organizations. This group does not have to be more than 5-7 people.

2. Who will be serving as the convener of the planning effort? Typically one or two individuals take on this responsibility. You will need to discuss who will prepare agendas, organize meetings, take and disseminate notes, etc.
3. How will the planning group work together? Again, because this is done best when it is a coalition of groups, think about how you will make decisions. Will you vote or work toward consensus on things like the agenda and invitation list? With whom should the final decision rest should there be disagreement?
4. If you already have a coalition, how can this effort be incorporated into the existing work of that group? Should a separate coalition or working group be established in order to bring in additional partners? Can a strategic planning effort about advancing sex education in public schools be connected with an existing conference or other convening?
5. What are you going to call this effort? It could be the "Future of Sex Education in \_\_\_\_ (fill in locale)". Perhaps it is something along the lines of "envisioning healthier students" or "promoting coordinated school health for every student." Whatever you call it, the name should reflect your goals, the current climate in your state and/or community, and what you believe will ensure maximum involvement and participation.
6. What is the scope of your efforts to advance comprehensive sex education? Will you be working at a local, regional or state-wide level? Will the plan be focused on policy/advocacy efforts or in-school implementation strategies? Knowing the answer to this will impact who should be invited to the actual strategic planning meeting.
7. Who should be invited? Given that the focus is on implementing comprehensive sexuality education in school-based settings, consider inviting the following:
  - a. Relevant staff at state governmental agencies including departments of education and health and/or human services. Even if your effort is a local one, staff working at the state level can provide important networks within the state and nation-wide. For example, your state department of education's HIV/AIDS Coordinator, Curriculum Director and/or Coordinated School Health Program Manager can serve as

- important connectors between the state’s school districts, the department of education and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of Adolescent School Health;
- b. Relevant staff at county or city health and human service departments who may be working in public schools;
- c. Superintendents, principals, curriculum supervisors, teachers, school nurses and school counselors;
- d. Representatives from other state or local public education related institutions. For example, your state’s board of education, association of school administrators, Parent Teacher Association, state education association, or at the local level, representative(s) from the local school board;
- e. Parents;
- f. Students (currently enrolled in school as well as those who have recently graduated);
- g. Religious/faith-based leaders;
- h. Community-based organizations working to advance adolescent sexual health (i.e., a local family planning provider, Planned Parenthood or other service organization). Here are two other organizations that may or may not be relevant depending on your state/community:
  - i. American Cancer Society which is working to advance school health through their National School Health Education Standards
  - ii. HIV Prevention Community Planning Groups which are charged with developing a community driven plan to address HIV prevention;
- i. Advocacy organizations working to advance adolescent sexual health (i.e., ACLU);
- j. Community- and state-focused funders who are committed to improving public education and health outcomes for young people;

- k. Researchers familiar with your state and local area (i.e., epidemiologists from the state health department, faculty at a local university, etc.).

Remember that the more people you invite to participate in the strategic planning meeting, the more challenging it may be to manage the agenda. Twenty to thirty participants is ideal.

Also, a special note about having funders participate: It is important to be clear from the beginning—to both funders and other participants—that funders are being invited to participate and not to evaluate current or potential grantees. In addition, non-funder participants should be discouraged from advancing their own organizational agendas. The goal is to create an environment in which all individuals can freely share their thoughts and ideas recognizing that the whole of the effort is greater than any one organizational agenda.

- 8. Revisit your stated goal from question #2. Next, determine the objectives of the meeting. At the end of the day, what do you want to have accomplished?
- 9. What is the agenda? A sample agenda for a one-day meeting follows. If you have more time, you can always increase the amount of time for the small groups to more fully flesh out their work.
- 10. Who can manage logistics? Space, invitations, registration, name tags, note taking during the event, and dissemination of notes afterwards are just a few of the logistical tasks that will need to be managed.
- 11. How will you cover the costs of the meeting? There are three items that may be costly—space, food and a meeting facilitator. You’ll need to discuss whether any or all of these items can be donated as an in-kind contribution. If not, you’ll need to prepare a budget and devise a plan to raise the necessary funds to cover these expenses.

**SAMPLE INVITATION:**

Envisioning the Future of Sex Ed in \_\_\_\_\_

DATE, TIME, PLACE

It is our pleasure to invite you to a strategic planning session for the future of sex education in \_\_\_\_\_ (or other name). (Names of convening organizations here) have been working together to plan this meeting which will include representatives from (select or add to list that follows): state departments of education, teachers, school administrators, policy makers, youth, funders, sexuality educators, researchers, AIDS organizations, and state coalition leaders. (See attached list of invited participants.)

The purpose of this meeting is to \_\_\_\_\_. We will address (select or add to list that follows) policy, advocacy, research, teacher preparedness and training and classroom resources. This meeting is by invitation only (no substitutes) and we hope you will join us. Should you have any questions, please contact \_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

(Names of conveners here)

(Attach via email or mail a copy of the agenda, list of invited participants, registration information (form, email, number to call) and directions to the meeting facility.)

# Conducting the Meeting

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This sample agenda is very full. To move through the agenda in the time allotted, it is very helpful to have a facilitator. The facilitator's job is to guide the process and conversations toward the defined goal and objectives, to ensure participation, to build and maintain rapport among participants, to encourage the open expression of diverse points of view and to keep to the allotted time.

One of the most notorious ways for an agenda to get derailed is to spend too much time on introductions. It seems like a small thing, but without clear guidance from the facilitator, introductions can take up a lot of time. Ask people to simply state their name and affiliation. If you anticipate having many new people together in the room, consider sending out the list of attendees in advance so that people will at least be familiar with names and organizational affiliations. You should also make this list available to each participant as they register. You can also facilitate introductions and build rapport by inviting people to come early for a meet-and-greet over a continental breakfast, by encouraging them to network during lunch, by asking them to reintroduce themselves (quickly) when they get into their small groups, and by having everyone state their name/organizational affiliation each time they address the large group.

Registration can be "self check-in," meaning participants can pick up their name tag and materials for the day. Again, materials should include a list of participants, as well as the agenda and any speaker handouts.

The meeting space should allow for large group discussion as well as areas for break-out groups. Groups will need plenty of flip chart paper, markers, and masking tape. Having extra pens and notepads is also a good idea.

At the end of the meeting, allow a few minutes for participants to complete an evaluation form. Here are some sample sentence stems you can have participants complete on your evaluation:

- The most valuable part of this meeting to me was...
- I wish that...
- I still have questions/concerns about...
- Beyond the report of today's meeting, I'd like the next step in this process to be...
- Something I'd like the meeting conveners to know is...

## SAMPLE AGENDA (ONE DAY MEETING)

45 minutes Welcome, Introductions and Focusing or Ice Breaker Activity

15 minutes Goal, Objectives and Agenda for the Day

1 hour Current Environment around Sexuality Education

*This portion of the agenda is important for laying the foundation for the remainder of the day. Depending on the scope of your efforts, you may decide to ask some of the participants to share their perspectives as part of a panel format. Here is one example of how you might organize this section of the agenda:*

Speaker 1: National – What is happening at the national level? Consider inviting a representative from Advocates for Youth, Answer or SIECUS to provide an overview.

Speaker 2: State – What is happening at the state level? This should, at a minimum, include an overview of any state law or mandate (or pending legislation) pertaining to sex education, content standards for health and/or sexuality education, teacher certification and/or professional development requirements, etc. From an implementation perspective, it should include any information you have about what school districts presently are teaching in sex education, including the age at which specific topics are being taught, and the background of the professionals who are teaching those topics.

Speaker 3: Local – What is the curriculum or what are the materials being taught in your local schools? Who are the key supporters of sex education? What local data do you have?

Speaker 4: Opportunities for and barriers to for moving forward. In terms of opportunities, are there key partnerships in place, frameworks for advancing implementation (i.e., existing curriculum, training mechanism, etc.)? Barriers should address the funding climate, public support (real and perceived), opposition groups/individuals that may become mobilized, etc.

30-45 minutes Small Group Set-Up

*Decide how you want to break into smaller groups and what the task of each small group will be. Here are three suggestions for how to accomplish this:*

1. Building from the discussion about opportunities and barriers, prioritize and rank the opportunities and barriers to determine the topics to be discussed in small groups. For example, an opportunity could be an existing policy in support of sex education. A small group could begin deliberating about how to build on this opportunity and strengthen it. A barrier may be lack of school administration support. Another small group could come up with some realistic strategies for overcoming this barrier. Keep in mind that it is okay if a priority is identified for which the group needs more information. In this case, the job of the small group will be to come up with the relevant questions, a process for answering them and a procedure for how they will report back to the group.

2. Divide the group into smaller groups by “essential elements” including:
  - a. Advocacy, including administrative (i.e., pushing for implementation of existing laws/regulations), grassroots community mobilization and legislative

b. Implementation, including teacher training, curriculum and resource development, and capacity-building

c. Funding, including public and private sources of support

3. Divide into smaller groups by first identifying possible interventions. These could include introducing legislation, expanding standards to include sexuality education, building a cadre of trainers to build capacity of teachers to deliver sexuality education effectively, and so on. After making a list of possible interventions, assign each small group one intervention. If there is a longer list of interventions, charge the group with prioritizing them and divide into smaller groups accordingly.

*Regardless of how you organize the small groups, there should be no more than four or five small group discussion topics/goals. Also, small groups should comprise a mix of participants. It would be easy, for example, for the educators to migrate toward the school-based implementation group. Including a teacher, however, in a discussion about advocacy could benefit those who are more familiar with advocacy than with implementation. To do this effectively, consider assigning people to groups in advance denoting (with a number on their name tag, for instance) whether they represent an advocacy group, implementer, funder, researcher, etc. When it comes time to break into small groups, it will be easier to make sure that these groups have a diverse representation of viewpoints and experiences.*

LUNCH (30 minutes)

1 hour                      Small Group Discussions and Information Synthesis

*It helps to provide some guidance to each group about what they will need to report on at the conclusion of their time together. These reports could include things like key objectives for the short-, mid- and long-term, issues that need further investigation, indicators and measures of success, potential partners, etc.*

1+ hour                      Small Group Report Outs

*It is important to be clear in advance what you want the small groups to report on. For example, you may consider asking each small group for their top five prioritized actions or recommendations.*

30 minutes                      Next Steps & Closure

*It is essential to leave this meeting with a clear sense of next steps, the identification of who is responsible for completing those next steps, how you will communicate with one another (i.e., via a listserv), when you will convene again, etc.*

# After the Meeting

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As soon as possible after the meeting, send out a summary of the day. You do not need to worry as much about documenting each part of the day, but you should be able to provide a meaningful summary of the morning presentations, the reports from each of the small groups and the next steps. We encourage you to send a copy of your meeting summary to one of the FoSE partner organizations as a way to know whether the tool kit is being used, the results it produced, etc.

To maintain momentum, the next steps should be as concrete as possible. When will the group reconvene? Where? Who is in charge of the next phase of work? What is the timeline? Many of the same questions about how the group will work together to plan the meeting in the first place are relevant here.

These meetings can take some work, but they can yield invaluable results to your community, schools, and state. If you have any questions about this process, please don't hesitate to contact any of the FoSE national partner organizations:

Advocates for Youth	<a href="mailto:info@advocatesforyouth.org">info@advocatesforyouth.org</a>
Answer	<a href="mailto:answered@rci.rutgers.edu">answered@rci.rutgers.edu</a>
SIECUS	<a href="mailto:siecus@siecus.org">siecus@siecus.org</a>

