



# Chapter 3. Organizing the Weed and Seed Steering Committee

## Overview

This chapter is designed to assist you with organizing a Steering Committee that will meet the needs of your community and maximize the chance of your Weed and Seed strategy's success. A step-by-step process for organizing the Steering Committee is presented—starting with an overall vision for a well-functioning and successful Steering Committee. The extent to which you follow the seven steps as presented and in the order described depends on the environment in which you are operating. Circumstances will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction; you will need to take the path most suitable to your site.

## Vision

Weed and Seed is a collaborative effort among organizations and individuals that care about, or should care about, the designated neighborhood. This collaboration is reflected in the Steering Committee, which provides a structure for building a commitment to Weed and Seed, identifying areas of greatest community need, coordinating programs and services for local residents, and ensuring everyone involved is working toward the same goals.

The membership of the Steering Committee is large and diverse. Individuals from four key stakeholder groups must be included as members: the U.S. Attorney or a designee, residents of the designated neighborhood, city or county government representatives, and local law enforcement officials. Additional committee members may include representatives of the district attorney and public defender offices, Federal and State law enforcement agencies, social service agencies, housing organizations,

recreation and employment agencies, schools, nonprofit and community organizations, religious institutions, foundations, small businesses, and corporations.

Community participation, a key principle of Weed and Seed, is reflected in the composition of the Steering Committee. The many residents who serve on the Steering Committee play an important role in decision-making. They are grassroots representatives and not simply individuals serving in official capacities, such as government employees and elected officials.

An effective leader who commands respect in both the weeding and seeding areas is appointed chairperson of the Steering Committee. EOWS recommends that the leader be the U.S. Attorney or designee, although this may depend on the circumstances of the particular site. A cochair, such as a resident or a private-sector representative, may be appointed.

The Steering Committee members bring several qualities and skills to the Weed and Seed effort, including leadership, guidance, vision, direction, and management. Members also serve in positions of authority within the organizations they represent (e.g., managers in government agencies, community leaders, nonprofit directors), enabling them to commit and deliver resources that are required to effect real change in the designated area. (These resources may be in the form of funding, staff, volunteers, or in-kind services.)

The Steering Committee is the governing body for Weed and Seed. It serves as the highest authority within an organizational structure that

includes subcommittees for the various component areas of Weed and Seed, a Weed and Seed coordinator and/or other staff, and links to local programs or initiatives that complement a site's goals and objectives.

Initially, the Steering Committee meets monthly to establish the organizational structure, develop a vision for the neighborhood, and oversee development of the Weed and Seed strategy. As the process moves to strategy implementation, the Steering Committee meets quarterly to focus on key areas of responsibility such as developing weeding and seeding policies, coordinating subcommittee activities, approving changes to the strategic plan, approving hiring and management of staff, monitoring progress on goals and objectives, and providing leadership and advocacy for the Weed and Seed strategy. The day-to-day operational issues and concerns are addressed by the subcommittees within the component areas.

U.S. Attorneys play a central role in Weed and Seed—particularly in the organization of the Steering Committee. This involvement stems from their leadership role in coordinating Federal, State, and local law enforcement efforts; their role within their districts as the local representative for the U.S. Department of Justice, and their growing involvement in community issues and affairs. The latter role is further defined in the next section.

## Role of the U.S. Attorney

U.S. Attorneys are involved in several ways in the early planning stages of Weed and Seed. First, the U.S. Attorney should initially meet with community leaders to educate them about Weed and Seed and gain widespread commitment to the concept. Second, the U.S. Attorney can help create a core group of local officials to start the planning process and be responsible for selecting the Steering Committee members and, if

necessary, the designated neighborhood. Third, the U.S. Attorney should be a member of the Steering Committee and is encouraged to serve as the committee's chair or cochair. (The U.S. Attorney should not serve as a board member of the organization that administers the Weed and Seed grant.)

You can begin efforts to establish Weed and Seed in your area in various ways. In some cases, local officials such as the mayor, police chief, and city council members may decide to establish a Weed and Seed initiative in their city—without preselecting the designated area. In other cases, community leaders may want to bring Weed and Seed to a distressed neighborhood with particular needs. In either case, the discussions at the local level should begin with the U.S. Attorney, who can make contact with EOWS at the Federal level and take the first steps to organize the Steering Committee locally. The major difference is that in the first example, the first few steps of the organizing process will involve selecting the designated neighborhood. (In all cases, the designated neighborhood must meet certain criteria based on an analysis of factual information and community needs. See chapter 2.)

## Implementation Process

### Step 1: Meet With Local Officials and Community Leaders To Educate and Gain Commitment to Weed and Seed

It is vital to get the support upfront from key local officials such as the mayor, police chief, city council members, county executives, and the district attorney. The U.S. Attorney is in a good position to meet with these officials and hold the initial discussions about Weed and Seed. The results of these discussions are important because they establish the direction, character, and framework for the entire initiative. The following important issues must be emphasized:



- Weed and Seed requires coordinated efforts to revitalize high-crime and economically deprived neighborhoods. The city should be willing to commit publicly to promoting the success of this complex undertaking.
- The selection of a specific neighborhood may mean funds will be diverted from other sections of the city. Consequently, the mayor must prioritize resources according to the level of the problems identified throughout the city. This approach can be politically risky.
- Weed and Seed requires coordination among Federal, State, and local law enforcement efforts. An atmosphere of cooperation and trust must exist if the initiative is going to operate successfully.
- The city must be willing to redirect or redeploy existing resources to assist law enforcement and restoration efforts in the designated neighborhood. This will require city departments to evaluate current plans, examine available resources, and revise operations.
- Community policing must be implemented in the designated area. Weed and Seed may help augment current community policing efforts in the department.
- Successful coordination and management of the Weed and Seed strategy require continuing staff resources. There are several models

for managing these resources and administering grants. Weed and Seed can be administered by the local government, the local police department, or a local nonprofit agency. Whichever model you choose, the person in charge (e.g., the mayor, police chief, nonprofit executive) must be willing to commit the resources of a staff person who is able to coordinate the activities of multiple agencies and who understands the processes associated with community restoration. If Weed and Seed funding is obtained, a portion of those funds can be used to support the staff person.

In all cases, the entity that administers the funding must see itself as the fiscal agent for the Weed and Seed Steering Committee and the strategy as a whole.

These initial discussions should result in a general agreement about the program's overall scope, the extent of the city's commitment of resources, and the general membership and timing of the Steering Committee's formation. These and similar issues must be addressed in this initial stage of organizing the Steering Committee. The preliminary discussions should lead to agreements that frame the context, scope, foundation, and timelines on which the Weed and Seed strategy is implemented.

## **Step 2: Create a Core Group of Individuals To Provide Leadership**

Involving too many individuals in the initial Weed and Seed planning may slow down the work process instead of promoting it. You should consider establishing a core group of local officials and community representatives to

- Meet with local residents to get their support for and buy-in of Weed and Seed.
- Conduct an initial needs assessment of the designated neighborhood or alternative sites (if more than one is being considered).

- Select individuals to serve on the Steering Committee.

Once again, the U.S. Attorney is uniquely positioned to form such a group and provide the leadership to accomplish its tasks.

This core group should comprise local officials and community representatives. You may want to expand participation in this group as each activity is completed. However, the people you involve at each step should be selected for their skills and ability to complete a specific task rather than for the prestige of their position.

The U.S. Attorney may initially convene the core group. Each participant should agree to help develop and implement the Weed and Seed strategy and should be considered a founder of and future participant in the business of the Steering Committee.

The core group should hold public meetings and attend meetings of existing community organizations in the designated neighborhood to fully explain Weed and Seed and attain grassroots support. This is best accomplished by including key neighborhood residents at the start of the planning process. Without their support, Weed and Seed will not have the opportunity to succeed.

If the core group is considering several possible Weed and Seed locations, the level of community support should be an important factor in determining the designated neighborhood.

It is also the responsibility of the core group to conduct an initial needs assessment of the pre-selected site or possible sites, if more than one is being considered. In either case, the designated neighborhood must meet the established criteria for site selection, that is, signs of neighborhood deterioration (high crime, high unemployment, high dropout rate, high rate of public

assistance) and signs of neighborhood potential (existing empowerment zone, community organizations in place). See chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the site selection. The core group should confirm or make the decision about which neighborhood should serve as the designated area for Weed and Seed.

### Step 3: Select the Stakeholder Organizations and Individuals To Participate on the Steering Committee

Many organizations and individuals from various disciplines should be considered for Steering Committee membership.

#### Required members

Weed and Seed requires that the Steering Committee have representation from four key stakeholders:

- The U.S. Attorney or a designee.
- Residents of the designated neighborhood.
- The mayor, city manager, or county executive, or a designated representative of city or county government.
- The police chief or sheriff or a designated representative of local law enforcement.

#### Additional members

Other stakeholder groups will probably be represented on the Steering Committee. The core leadership group should decide which individuals and organizations (in addition to those representing the four key stakeholder groups) should be invited to serve on the committee, depending on the particular site and circumstances. The following groups should be considered in your deliberations on the composition of the Steering Committee:

- District attorney's office.
- Federal and State law enforcement agencies.

- Social service agencies.
- Housing organizations.
- Recreation and employment agencies.
- Schools.
- Nonprofit and community-based organizations.
- Religious institutions.
- Foundations.
- Small businesses and corporations.
- Public defender service.

Leadership, guidance, vision, direction, and management are the qualities and skills required of your Steering Committee members to create and implement an effective Weed and Seed strategy. Consider these skills and other issues when deciding who would best represent the stakeholder organizations on the Steering Committee. First, representatives should be higher level city managers so that decisions and commitments made at Steering Committee meetings will be meaningful. Second, representatives should commit to attending Steering Committee meetings without sending alternates (alternates can impede the ability to make decisions). These two issues mean that the need to have executive-level officials (e.g., mayor, police chief, school superintendent) on the Steering Committee must be balanced with the need to have active members who will attend meetings regularly and be knowledgeable about the designated area (e.g., residents, community-based organizations, and mid-level managers with direct authority over the designated area).

Other members to consider for the Steering Committee represent the following organizations:

- State attorney general's office.

- State planning agencies.
- State and local departments of
  - Social service.
  - Housing.
  - Health and mental health.
  - Recreation.
  - Employment.
- United Way.
- Private community-based organizations.
- Workforce investment councils.
- Federal departments and agencies such as
  - Housing and Urban Development.
  - Health and Human Services.
  - Education.
  - Labor.
  - Commerce.
  - Agriculture.
  - Transportation.
  - Small Business Administration.
  - Community Relations Service (U.S. Department of Justice).
- Local public housing authority.
- Housing authority police.
- Victim and witness coordinators.
- Local university department of criminal justice or social services.
- Hospitals and health care facilities.

- Community foundations.
- Tenant organizations.

### Committee size

You must give careful consideration to the size of the Steering Committee. Some Weed and Seed sites have a Steering Committee with 18 members; some have as many as 30. A total of 20–25 members is the typical size for a well-functioning Steering Committee. The committee must be inclusive, but this must be balanced with the fact that having a larger group may result in poor attendance at meetings and the inability to make decisions. You will have the opportunity to include additional individuals in planning and decisionmaking through the subcommittee structure (see step 6, below).

### Resident representatives

No set number of residents is required for the Steering Committee. However, citizen participation is a key premise of Weed and Seed, and residents must feel they have a voice on the Steering Committee and a substantial role in decisionmaking. Representation on the Steering Committee is one of the primary means for residents to be involved in policymaking and decisionmaking.

Another consideration is that residents serving on the Steering Committee should be grassroots representatives and not individuals serving in official capacities (e.g., government employee, legislator). If you include a resident who is serving in an official capacity, the individual should be identified as a representative of the organization for which he or she works rather than as a resident representative.

### Chairperson

EOWS recommends that the U.S. Attorney serve as chair or cochair of the Steering Committee. A resident or private-sector representative may be desirable as cochair. Again, the circumstances

and environment in which you are operating should dictate the best candidates for chair. The most important considerations are the leadership qualities of the individuals and their level of commitment. The chair and cochair should be people who can effectively lead, inspire, and motivate everyone involved.

## Step 4: Determine the Roles and Responsibilities of the Steering Committee

The core group should develop at least a rough sketch of the roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee. This information will be important during the selection process and when asking the selected individuals to commit to serving on the Steering Committee. Once the Steering Committee is formed, members should revisit and finalize roles and responsibilities.

It should be clear from the outset that Steering Committee members are responsible for more than strategic planning, policy, and management—they must ensure that the organization they represent commits resources to the Weed and Seed effort. These commitments may take the form of an agency reprogramming staff for service provision in the designated neighborhood or a community organization providing resident volunteers for Safe Haven activities. Whatever the commitments, they should be formally identified in a written Memorandum of Agreement so that each committee member is aware of them and followthrough can be monitored.



The initial responsibilities of the Steering Committee should differ from their permanent responsibilities during implementation of your strategies, programs, and activities. In the beginning, the committee will oversee development of the Weed and Seed strategy, focusing on vision development, needs assessment, goal setting, and the creation of subcommittees and workgroups.

The following are the roles and responsibilities you should consider for the Steering Committee during strategy development:

- Develop a future vision of the designated neighborhood.
- Conduct an indepth community needs assessment.
- Establish subcommittees for strategy development.
- Oversee development of the strategic plan and give final approval.
- Approve selection of the Weed and Seed coordinator and other staff.
- Identify resource commitments from each member.

Once the Weed and Seed strategy is developed and implementation is under way, the roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee will focus on policy, management, and advocacy. More specifically, the roles and responsibilities should include

- Oversight and management of goals and objectives.
- Guidance on and resolution of implementation issues.
- Coordination of subcommittee activities.
- Development and integration of weeding and seeding policies.

- Approval of changes to the strategic plan.
- Approval of grant applications and adjustments.
- Approval of the hiring and management of the coordinator and other staff.
- Monitoring of progress on evaluation and effectiveness of the Weed and Seed strategy.
- Provision of leadership and advocacy for the Weed and Seed strategy.

### **Step 5: Develop the Decisionmaking Processes To Govern the Weed and Seed Initiative**

Steering Committee members should develop the decisionmaking processes that will enable the committee to govern Weed and Seed effectively. Most groups define their decisionmaking processes through bylaws, agendas, and policies and procedures. The Steering Committee should develop a set of bylaws and follow up with written policies and procedures to address questions such as: How often will the Steering Committee meet? How will meeting agendas be established? Will decisions be made through consensus or majority rule? How and when will vote taking occur?

### **Step 6: Create an Organizational Structure To Develop and Implement the Weed and Seed Strategy**

At the outset, the Steering Committee should establish a blueprint of the Weed and Seed organization and how people will be grouped to accomplish its mission and work. The structure should include the Steering Committee (the governing body). Initially, for planning and developing the strategy, a subcommittee for each component area—law enforcement; community policing; prevention, intervention, and treatment; and community restoration—may also be included. Task forces or workgroups may be established on an ad hoc basis.

During strategy implementation, you may decide the subcommittees should be integrated into two—a Weed Subcommittee and a Seed Subcommittee—depending on local circumstances and the goals and objectives you want to achieve.

The subcommittees should be task oriented and include people who work on the front lines of service agencies. Primarily, subcommittee members should be individuals who can contribute skills, knowledge, resources, and time to developing and implementing your Weed and Seed strategy. This structure will enable you to widen the net of participation in Weed and Seed. Mid-level managers and frontline staff from stakeholder organizations and residents should be considered for the subcommittees and workgroups. You should assign a few Steering Committee members to the subcommittees to ensure ongoing and effective channels of communication.

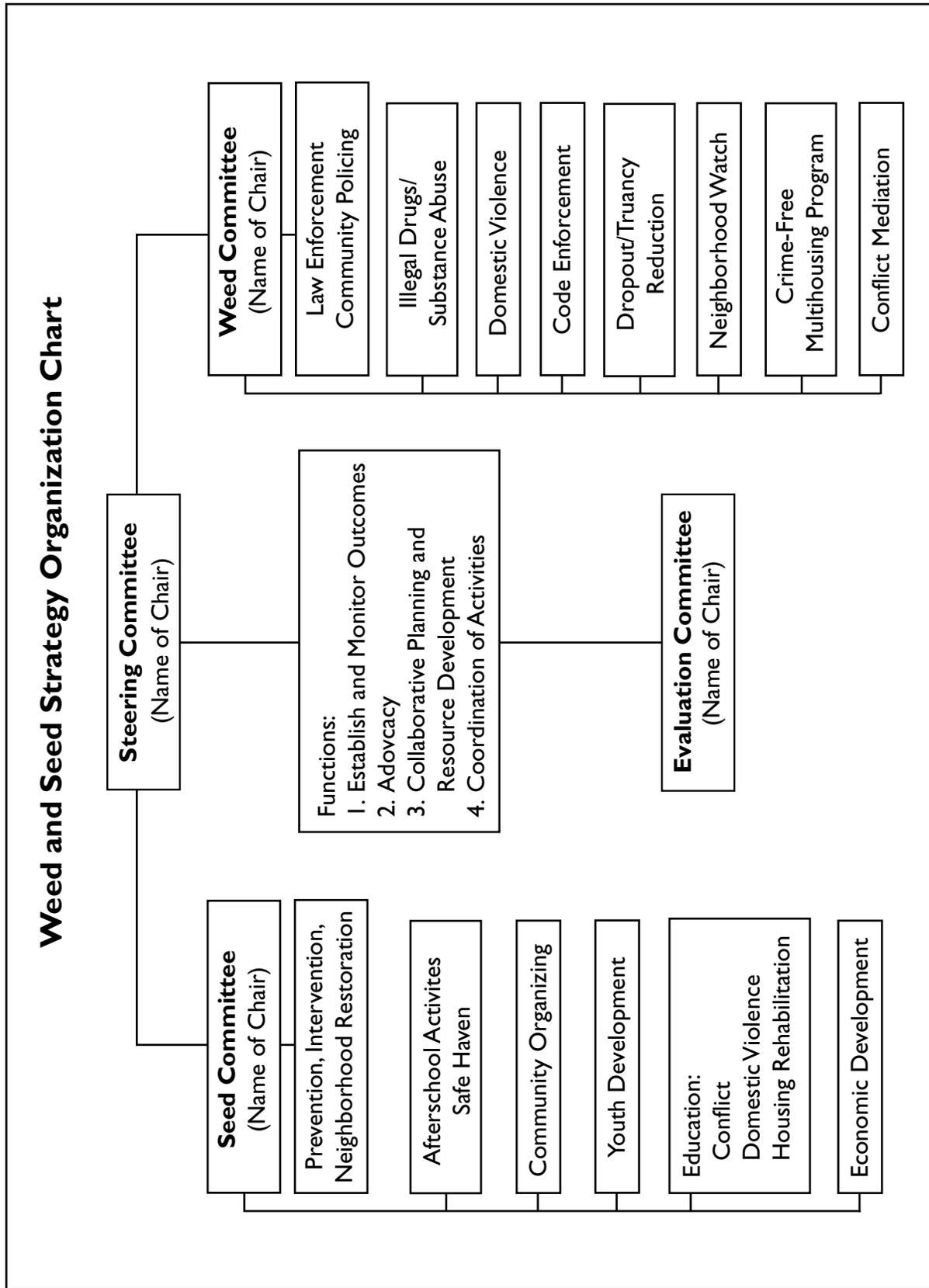
Initially, the subcommittees should be responsible for developing detailed plans for the four components of the Weed and Seed strategy. Later, the subcommittees should focus on coordinating tasks and activities, resolving implementation problems, determining what works, and changing courses of action when necessary.

### **Step 7: Determine Initial Tasks of the Steering Committee**

The first major task of the Steering Committee is to develop and oversee the Weed and Seed strategy. The committee must undergo a systematic process for developing a multiyear strategic plan (which should cover at least 2–3 years). This process requires the Steering Committee to develop a future vision of the community, conduct an indepth needs assessment, establish priorities, develop goals and objectives, and create an implementation plan.



## Exhibit 3–2. Weed and Seed Strategic Plan



## Exhibit 3–3. Weed and Seed Strategy Development Tool

### Definitions

Here are some definitions that can help Weed and Seed Steering Committees in formulating strategies for the Official Recognition application (OR):

1. A **strategy** is a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, decisions, actions, and resource allocations that defines what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it.
2. **Critical issues** are areas of fundamental change affecting the Weed and Seed Steering Committee's mandates, programs or services, management, and structure.

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### Instructions

Based on the information collected from the community needs assessment component of the OR, you should be able to take the general list of critical priorities identified by the community and incorporate them into strategic issues to be addressed by Weed and Seed. A strategic issue should be one in which Weed and Seed's partners can collectively do something about that results in a positive outcome. Once you identify some critical priorities that may correspond to law enforcement; community policing; prevention, intervention, and treatment; and neighborhood restoration, you need to ask yourselves,

- Why is this an issue?
- How is it related to Weed and Seed's mission, mandates, programs and services, internal strengths and weaknesses, or external opportunities or threats?
- What are the consequences for not addressing this issue?

### What Are the Critical Priorities Affecting the Community?

Remember, they must correspond to the issues/needs identified in the community needs assessment section of the OR.

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|----|-----|
| 1. | 6.  |
| 2. | 7.  |
| 3. | 8.  |
| 4. | 9.  |
| 5. | 10. |

### Opportunity/Challenge Identification Exercise

Given the critical priorities/issues identified by the Steering Committee, address each of these priorities/issues by responding to the following questions as a team. Please have someone from your team record your answers. Also note that the **last question** is extremely important, as you must work to formulate a **goal** in addressing this issue. **This worksheet must be completed for each priority/issue identified under each of the four components.**

What is the critical priority or issue? Record it here.

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- How does this issue relate to Weed and Seed's mission, internal strengths and weaknesses, or external opportunities and threats?

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(continued)

## Exhibit 3–3. Weed and Seed Strategy Development Tool (continued)

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- Strengths—What are Weed and Seed’s current strengths in responding to this issue? *Consider the contributions of each partner.*

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- Weaknesses—What are Weed and Seed’s current weaknesses in responding to this issue? *Consider the contributions of each partner and the quality of the relationships.*

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- Opportunities—What are some opportunities that Weed and Seed can pursue in addressing this issue? *What are some programs or services currently being offered by the partners?*

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- Threats—What are some threats that Weed and Seed should be aware of in responding to this issue?

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- What are the consequences of not addressing this issue?

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- **What should be our goal in addressing this issue?** *What do you want to change/improve in the community?*

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### Strategy/Implementation Plan Development Exercise

In order to develop strategies for each of the four components of Weed and Seed, this exercise is designed to help you collectively address key factors in implementing these strategies. These factors draw from the previous exercise and include identifying the issues, working through the various steps in formulating goals, action steps, and timelines associated with the implementation of the overall strategies.

Please work in a team to address the following questions:

- What is the issue? Record from previous exercise.

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### Exhibit 3–3. Weed and Seed Strategy Development Tool (continued)

- What goals were identified to be achieved in addressing this issue? Record from previous exercise.

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- What are practical solutions we might pursue to address this issue and achieve our goal? *Is there an organization that is currently offering a solution that could be leveraged?*

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- What are some barriers to realizing these practical solutions? *No organization responding to issue? Lack of financial resources? No expertise represented on the Steering Committee?*

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- What major initiatives or actions might we propose to achieve these practical solutions directly or indirectly through overcoming these barriers?

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- How much time will be required to completely implement this strategy?

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- Who will be the lead for this strategy and what partners will also be involved in the implementation of this strategy?

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- How will you measure the success of the strategy?

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## Exhibit 3–4. Weed and Seed Steering Committee Survey

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1. What role/position do you have within the Steering Committee? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How long have you been in this role/position?

- Less than 1 month     6 months–1 year     1–2 years     2+ years

3. What do you believe are your primary responsibilities as a Steering Committee member?

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4. What positions do you hold *outside* of the Steering Committee?

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5. Do you have a firm understanding of Weed and Seed?     Yes     No

6. What personal strengths do you bring to the Weed and Seed Steering Committee?

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7. What strengths does your organization bring to the Steering Committee?

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8. What are some of the weaknesses you feel that you bring to the Steering Committee?

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## Exhibit 3–4. Weed and Seed Steering Committee Survey (continued)

9. Given your understanding of the Steering Committee's purpose and responsibility, how would you complete the following sentence: The Steering Committee should

Start:

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Continue:

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Stop:

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10. In general, what issues do you think the Steering Committee needs to address immediately?

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11. What should the Steering Committee strive to achieve during scheduled meetings?

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12. Are there any issues that are nonnegotiable (not open for discussion)?

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