

ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY:

LEADING CARE, PAYMENT, AND SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

# Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results Facilitator Guide

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# Introduction

A strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results analysis (SOAR) is a way to inventory the climate and resources of your team and partner organizations. SOAR also provides a structure to collaboratively identify team goals.

## Objective

Learning collaborative core teams will identify strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results for their AHE initiatives through the use of a SOAR analysis or a similar approach.

SOAR analysis should be conducted in conjunction with creating and maintaining a team charter. When completed together, these activities will help LC teams:

- adequately define their mission, vision, and values
- understand how to best work together as a team
- identify assets that they can leverage for their work
- regularly assess their knowledge, accomplishments, and needs
- increase the chances that they will successfully advance health equity by making key changes in the complex and ever-evolving healthcare system.

## Acknowledgments

SOAR activities in this guide are adapted from:

Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros (2008).

Hoare, A., Dishke Hondzel, C., & Wagner, S. (May 2022). Program Review Handbook. Version 1.2. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. <https://programreviewhandbook.pressbooks.tru.ca/> (accessed June 2023)

Srivastva, S., & Cooperrider, D. (1990). Appreciative management and leadership: The power of positive thought and action in organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Stavros, J.M., Cooperrider, D L, & Kelley, D.L. (2003). Strategic inquiry appreciative intent: Inspiration to SOAR, a new framework for strategic planning. *AI Practitioner*. November, 10-17.

Stavros, J.M. & Hinrichs, G. (2009). *The thin book of SOAR: Building*.

Triesman, J., Lucas, A., Harrison, O., & Kastner, S. (2019). *The bridge to inclusion: An appreciative strategic planning process for the cultural awareness coalition of midland, Michigan*.

Master's thesis. University of Pennsylvania. Available at: (17) (PDF) *The Bridge to Inclusion: An Appreciative Strategic Planning Process for the Cultural Awareness Coalition of Midland, Michigan* (researchgate.net)

Whitney, D., Trosten-Bloom, A., Cooperrider, D. L., & Kaplin, B. (2002). *Encyclopedia of positive questions: Using appreciative inquiry to bring out the best in your organization*. Lakeshore Communications. Euclid, OH.

Facilitators might find these resources helpful.

# Timeline

## Suggested times to complete or update a SOAR analysis

We recommend that teams conduct a SOAR analysis at **the beginning** of the AHE Learning Collaborative experience.

We also recommend that teams review and update their SOAR analysis at the following points in time:

- **After** conducting a root cause analysis (RCA) with an equity lens and prioritizing root causes. The Root Cause Analysis will help teams identify weaknesses that need to be addressed as well as previously unidentified opportunities, particularly if the RCA utilizes a systems-focused approach (e.g., Why is the healthcare system less effective at helping Black children with asthma stay out of the hospital compared to white children with asthma?). Prioritizing Root Causes also helps teams to classify and prioritize when/how to address the weaknesses and opportunities.
- **After** designing, and before implementing, the care delivery transformation and payment mechanism(s). Once a team has reached the point of finalizing their care transformation and payment models they will have a clear and more defined/refined sense of their specific Aspirations and desired Results. At this point in time the team can a) review/revisit their Strengths and Opportunities (from the previous SOAR analysis) and b) update/revise as necessary their Aspirations and Results.

# Format Options

## Timing and Setting

There are separate activities for each of the four components of the SOAR analysis. The activities can be conducted in-person or virtually. Conducting the analysis for each component will take approximately two hours, for a total of eight hours. There are multiple ways to complete the SOAR analysis:

- The entire team can complete the analysis together during a single, day-long session.
- The entire team can complete the analyses together in multiple sessions.
- The team could conduct some parts of the analyses individually in an asynchronous manner and other parts together.

The detailed instructions for each component of the analysis describe how to implement these options.

After a format has been agreed upon, establish where breaks in the activity should occur for brief rests and for participants to take care of personal needs.

## Supplies

- In-person meeting room. Large enough for each person to sit comfortably at a table and for the group to move around the sides of the room (e.g., between the tables/chairs and the walls of the room). Consider the needs of those with different physical abilities.
- Large sticky flip charts
- Large rectangular post-it notes
- Thin sharpies (able to write legibly on post-it notes)

A virtual whiteboard or meeting space with sticky notes (e.g., Google Jamboard) can be utilized to serve the functions of the physical supplies noted above for virtual gatherings.

## Set Up Instructions

Distribute sticky flip charts, post-it notes, and sharpies around the room or set-up the virtual space(s).

# Strengths of Individuals

**The entire group identifies volunteers for the following roles (5 minutes):**

- 1 Discussion leader: ensures each person is heard and that the group stays on task
- 2 Recorder: writes on the flip chart(s) to take notes, if in-person; or on a virtual document (e.g., Google Doc, Miro, Jamboard) that can be shared in a virtual gathering space (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams)
- 3 Timekeeper: gives time checks to ensure that the tasks are completed in the allotted time

**Discussion Leader begins the session and reads the following (5 minutes):**

The purpose of strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results planning is to take inventory of the core Learning Collaborative (LC) team and partner organizations' current climates and resources. The results will help the team (and partner organizations') utilize its strengths, opportunities, and resources as it creates and updates its work plan to advance health equity.

SOAR analysis is often conducted in conjunction with creating and maintaining a team charter. When completed together, these activities will help the LC team:

- adequately define their mission, vision, and values
- understand how to best work together as a team
- identify assets that they can leverage for their work
- regularly assess their knowledge, accomplishments, and needs
- increase the chances that they will successfully advance health equity by making key changes in the complex and ever-evolving healthcare system.

*Let's start with identifying our strengths:*

To excel at something means to do it extremely well, to be outstandingly good or proficient. Individuals excel by identifying and nurturing qualities of excellence within their daily life both in and outside of work.

**Individual team members work on their own and contemplate the following questions.**

They can write notes for themselves if they wish. The notes will not be shared with others.  
(10 minutes)

- 1 What is it about you and the way you show up in the world that's excellent? What do people tell you they appreciate about you? What effect do these skills or behaviors have on you and your sense of self? What effect do they have on people you interact with regularly? On your co-workers? In your department? In the organization as a whole?
- 2 What do you and others value most about yourself?
- 3 What do you and others value most about your ways of showing up at work?

**Individuals write at least two brief descriptions of their own strengths on post-it notes (1-5 words each).** Everyone is encouraged to write more than two. Write one description per post-it note. The descriptions will be shared with the entire group. *(5 minutes)*

- Write at least one equity-focused strength and one general (non-equity focused) strength. There is no strict definition of equity focused strengths. Examples include:
  - “I’m good at ensuring everyone gets a chance to speak.”
  - “I’m good at valuing life experiences different from my own.”
  - “I have a lot of experience analyzing quantitative health and healthcare data to identify inequities.”
  - “I have experience working in the types of community based organizations that we want to partner with.”
- Please write your name on each post-it note.
- Everyone is encouraged to also submit strengths that they see in specific teammates. Include the person’s name on the post-it.

**Individuals place their post-it notes on large post-it flip chart sheets placed around the room** if gathering in-person, or on a shared virtual resource (e.g., Google Docs), if gathering virtually. *(3 minutes)*

**Potential Modification:** The activities described above can be conducted in an asynchronous fashion by providing the instructions in advance and asking individual team members to complete the tasks on their own by a specific date/time. The group then completes the remaining tasks together.

**The entire team groups the post-its together into common themes/ideas.** *(12 minutes)*

**The facilitator reviews the themes with the group** and the group discusses their reactions and thoughts. *(15 minutes)*

*Suggested discussion questions:*

- What surprised you about the strengths of the individuals in the group?
- What about the strengths excites or energizes you?
- What was it like to share each other’s strengths in this way?
- What did you learn from the process?

**The recorder documents the themes, reactions, and thoughts that the group noticed** and other important discoveries regarding equity-focused and general strengths.

Make the notes available for the group to reference, as needed, over the remainder of the SOAR analysis and the long-term course of their work together.

# Strengths of Partner Organizations

**The entire group identifies volunteers for the following roles. (5 minutes)**

- 1 Discussion leader: ensures each person is heard and that the group stays on task
- 2 Recorder: writes on the flip chart(s) to take notes, if in-person; or on a virtual document (e.g., Google Doc, Miro, Jamboard) that can be shared in a virtual gathering space (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams)
- 3 Timekeeper: monitors time and provides time checks to ensure that tasks are completed in the allotted time

**Discussion Leader begins the session and reads the following. (5 minutes)**

Excellent organizations demonstrate levels of operations and services that transcend what is expected of them. The way they do things allows them to accomplish exceptional results, along with high levels of personal satisfaction. Excellent organizations are known by the people they serve to be trustworthy, reliable, and a provider of high quality services

**The Discussion Leader asks participants to work on their own and contemplate the following questions regarding their own organization.** They can write notes for themselves if they wish. The notes will not be shared with others. (10 minutes)

- 1 Put yourself in the shoes of the people that your team or organization serves. What do you think they would say if you asked them what makes your organization or team excellent? Consider people both internal and external to your organization or team.
- 2 When you think back to your beginnings with your organization, what were your most positive and powerful first impressions? What first attracted you to the organization and its people?
- 3 Consider your functional area or department in the organization. What are the things that make this group the best that it can possibly be? Think about addressing such things as your products, services, technology, processes, relationships, etc.
- 4 What do you value most about your organization?

**Individuals write at least two brief descriptions of their organization's strengths (1-5 words each),** but are encouraged to write more than two. Write one description per post-it note. These descriptions will be shared with the entire group. (5 minutes)

- Write at least one equity-focused strength and one general (non-equity focused) strength. There is no strict definition of equity focused strengths. Examples include:
  - We have a fair wage policy.
  - We instituted staff training, created a patient advisory council, and revised our patient policies so that we could achieve Leadership Status on the Human Rights Campaign Healthcare Equality Index
  - We stratify and regularly analyze all of our human resources data to identify internal inequities in hierarchy, promotions, staff turnover, etc. Then we take action to improve diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organization.

**Individuals place their post-it notes on large post-it notes flipchart sheets placed around the room**, or on a shared virtual resource (e.g., Google Docs), if gathering virtually. *(3 minutes)*

**Potential Modification:** The activities described above can be conducted in an asynchronous fashion by providing the instructions in advance and asking individual team members to complete the tasks on their own by a specific date/time. The group then completes the remaining tasks together either in-person or virtually.

**The entire team groups the post-its together into common themes/ideas.** *(12 minutes)*

**The facilitator reviews the themes with the group and the group discusses their reactions and thoughts.** Record the themes, reactions, and thoughts that the group noticed and other important discoveries regarding equity-focused and general strengths. Make the notes available for the group to reference, as needed, over the remainder of the SOAR analysis and the long-term course of their work together.

*Suggested discussion questions:*

- What surprised you about the strengths of the organizations?
- What about the strengths excites or energizes you?
- What was it like to share organization strengths in this way?
- What did you learn from the process?

**The recorder documents** the themes, reactions, and thoughts that the group noticed and other important discoveries regarding equity-focused and general strengths.

Make the notes available for the group to reference, as needed, over the remainder of the SOAR analysis and the long-term course of their work together. *(15 minutes)*



# Opportunities

**The entire group identifies volunteers for the following roles. (5 minutes)**

- 1 Discussion leader: ensures each person is heard and that the group stays on task
- 2 Recorder: writes on the flip chart(s) to take notes, if in-person; or on a virtual document (e.g., Google Doc, Miro, Jamboard) that can be shared in a virtual gathering space (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams)
- 3 Timekeeper: monitors time and provides time checks to ensure that the tasks are completed in the allotted time

**Discussion Leader begins the session and reads the following. (5 minutes)**

Now we are going to work on surfacing bold equity-focused questions that we would like to answer together over the course of our work as a team. This will help us to identify areas of opportunity and focus.

**The discussion leader invites each person in the group to contribute at least one bold question or opportunity to explore together over the life of the initiative.** For example: “Considering our individual, team, and organizational strengths, what questions do we want to answer during our work together?”, “Where do we have strong partnerships?”, “Where are we not acting in alignment with our values?”, “What do we want to accomplish?”, “What do our patients/members living with health and healthcare inequities need us to accomplish?”, “What feels possible right now?”, “What feels slightly out of reach?” People can contribute more than one bold question or opportunity.

- The recorder will add one question or opportunity per flip chart around the room so the questions are prominently displayed, if meeting in-person; or in separate locations on a shared virtual document (e.g., Jamboard, Miro), if meeting virtually. (20 minutes)

## Potential Modification:

The activity described above can be conducted in an asynchronous fashion by providing the instruction in advance and asking individual team members to complete the task on their own by a specific date/time. The facilitator can then provide a way for participants to submit their bold question(s) or opportunity(ies) and see others’ questions.

The next two activities below can be conducted in an asynchronous fashion by providing the instruction in advance and asking individual team members to complete the task on their own by a specific date/time. The facilitator can then provide a way for participants to submit their bold question(s) opportunity(ies) so that everyone can see all of the responses.

The remaining activities would be conducted in a group.

- Once the group has identified key questions and opportunities, the discussion leader will invite individuals to sit at their table and write a personal idea or vision on post-it notes corresponding to each of the questions/opportunities. Once they have written a note for each, they are encouraged to walk around the room and place them on the posters, if meeting in-person; or on a shared virtual document (e.g., Jamboard, Miro), if meeting virtually. (20 minutes)

- After everyone has placed their post-it notes with personal ideas and visions on the posters, the leader asks the group to spread out and individually walk around the room to read the notes. *(10 - 15 minutes)*
- After the group has completed reading the personal reflections and suggestions, the discussion leader will gather the group back together to select one or two questions they want to flesh out further. *(15 minutes)*
- The discussion leader then asks the large group to split into small groups for deeper discussion. The leader asks each group to discuss their question(s), synthesize the feedback and their thoughts and consider how to creatively present their findings to the whole group. *(15 minutes)*
- The discussion leaders will ask each small group to present their findings to the whole group. The leader and timekeeper ensure that there will be a few minutes to ask clarifying questions after each presentation.
- The recorder will document the discussion.
- Make the notes available for the group to reference, as needed, over the remainder of the SOAR analysis and the long-term course of their work together. *(20 minutes)*

# Aspirations

**The entire group identifies volunteers for the following roles. (5 minutes)**

- 1 Discussion leader: ensures each person is heard and that the group stays on task
- 2 Recorder: writes on the flip chart(s) to take notes
- 3 Timekeeper: monitors time and provides time checks to ensure that the tasks are completed in the allotted time

**Discussion Leader begins the session and reads the following (5 minutes):**

Today we will delve deeper into the opportunity/ies that we identified as a group during when we last met. We hope that together we can create some specific aspirations (or goals) for our work over the course of the initiative.

**The Discussion Leaders asks participants to break into small groups (3-5 people each).**

**Potential Modification:** The activity described below can be conducted in an asynchronous fashion by providing the instructions in advance and asking each small group to complete the tasks on their own by a specific date/time. The entire group then comes together to complete the remaining tasks in-person or virtually.

**Once in the small groups, the small group identifies volunteers for the following roles (5 minutes):**

- 1 Discussion leader: ensures each person is heard and that the group stays on task
- 2 Recorder: writes on the flip chart(s) to take notes
- 3 Timekeeper: monitors time and provides time checks to ensure that the assignment is completed in the allotted time

**The small group Discussion Leader facilitates and supports the group as they consider the following statement and questions (30-40 minutes):**

- 1 **Statement:** The AHE Learning Collaborative exists to serve a vision of a better world. When work is in service to a larger purpose it can be life-giving and compelling. People want to contribute and they can get great satisfaction from knowing that their work and their organization are positive forces in the world. Ideally, healthcare will be transformed and patients/members, communities, LC team members, and their colleagues will be energized and inspired.
  - a Ask small group members to answer the following questions:
    - i When have you most felt like your work was part of a positive force in the world, when you felt an alignment among your principles, purpose, and practices?  
Tell a story about what you were doing.
    - ii What do you see today (not future possibilities, but beginning to happen right now) that gives you hope for the future? This could be something on a global scale, or a personal experience. It could have to do with social or political events, or it could have to do with what you've experienced in your organization or your community.

- iii If a genie appeared right now in front of you, and offered to grant our LC team three wishes to heighten vitality and effectiveness in advancing health equity for patients/members, what would your three wishes be for. . .
  - 1 members/patients?
  - 2 communities?
  - 3 your organization?
  - 4 this LC team?
- iv Review the strengths of the individuals and organizations on your LC team (see notes from the Strengths component of the SOAR analysis) and also review the notes from the Opportunities activities. Then, imagine it is two years from now and visualize your Learning Collaborative team from the vantage point of an outcome that has improved equity. What does it look like? What is happening?

**2 Take a step back and individually explore the following. Feel free to write down your thoughts, draw pictures, etc.**

- a How did this come about?
- b What did you and the team do to make this happen?
- c What are the things that support this vision? Is it leadership, structures, training, procedures, etc.?
- d What makes this vision exciting to you?

**3 Take turns sharing your answers to the four questions above.**

**4 Next, see if the group can take the responses offered by the individuals and capture a common vision in a two-year aspiration statement on a flip-chart or notes page:**

“By (insert date), what we most aspire to do in terms of (chosen equity-focused opportunity) is. . .”

- a Use vivid language.
- b Be positive.
- c Be bold and provocative. Make your statement a stretch that will attract others.

**5 Together, come-up with a creative 5-minute portrayal as if the vision existed now that you will present to the larger group. Use as many group members as possible in the presentation.**

- a Have fun! Examples include: a TV news report, song or poem, skit, day in the life, interview, etc.

**Return to the large group.** The large group Discussion Leader will ask each group to share their aspiration statement and portrayal to the larger group. After the presentations the large group will share their thoughts and ideas about the visions and aspirations presented. *(30 minutes)*

Make the notes available for the group to reference, as needed, over the remainder of the SOAR analysis and the long-term course of their work together.

# Results

**The entire group identifies volunteers for the following roles (5 minutes):**

- 1 Discussion leader: ensures each person is heard and that the group stays on task
- 2 Recorder: writes on the flip chart(s) to take notes
- 3 Timekeeper: monitors time and provides time checks to ensure that the tasks are completed in the allotted time

**Discussion Leader begins the session and reads** the following (5 minutes):

Today we will identify ways to know that we have achieved the aspirations identified in our last session, and also outline how we intend to track progress towards our ambitions. We do not need to identify the specific goals at this time. Instead, we will utilize the information to define specific goals when we complete our team charter. It is important not to set too many measures to track early in the initiative, instead measure the 3-5 values or aspirations that are critical to success.

**The Discussion Leader then facilitates a discussion of the following questions** while the recorder documents notes and observations. (40 minutes)

- 1 Considering our strengths, opportunities, and aspirations, what meaningful measures will indicate we are on track with achieving our aspirations?
- 2 What measurable results do we want to see? What measurements will we be known for?
- 3 How will we know when we have achieved our aspirations?
  - a How do we translate that into something measurable?
  - b What numbers/statistics can we use to measure our progress towards our aspirations?

**Make the notes available for the group to reference, as needed over the long-term course of their work together.** Use the information to inform the team's charter.

# Background Information for SOAR Analysis Facilitators

An ongoing critique in the gray and academic literature stipulates that teams can be left feeling unmotivated and de-energized after focusing on the weaknesses and threats of traditional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analyses. It is also hypothesized that teams could achieve more positive benefits and outcomes by focusing on how to capitalize on their strengths and opportunities compared to trying to improve and eliminate weaknesses. Thus, many propose utilizing an alternative situational analysis method; Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) to maximize team energy and motivation and utilize resources more efficiently. However, there are also critiques in the gray and academic literature that a SOAR analysis, while valuable for the reasons described above, leaves teams and organizations vulnerable because they do not identify and address key internal weaknesses or external threats that may be essential to their long-term success. Most agree that there are pros and cons for SWOT and SOAR analyses.

There are also critiques of SWOT and SOAR based upon their static time frame (i.e., current factors). Critics argue that both approaches leave organizations and teams unprepared by failing to anticipate and proactively plan for inevitable shifts in the complex, adaptive, and changing operational environments of healthcare that will often occur shortly after the SWOT or SOAR analysis was conducted. An extreme example is the COVID-19 pandemic upending nearly every aspect of the healthcare system. Less extreme examples include work stoppages, staffing turnover, senior leadership turnover, and changing local, state, and federal political, policy, and regulatory environments. Scenario planning methods have been proposed to address this weakness because they are a) not a point-in-time static analysis (e.g., they attempt to predict future possibilities) and b) do not require predicting every possible future opportunity or challenge/threat (and how to respond). Rather scenario planning methods identify and anticipate a discreet number of future scenarios that represent the most likely potential factors that might influence a team or initiative. See the draft scenario planning activities below for more information.

Finally, SOAR components will likely change over the lifecycle of the team, especially aspirations and desired results. For example, aspirations and desired results may change between the time that LC teams form and when they negotiate and agree upon their health equity focus. Ideally, teams will revisit and update analyses as needed. Thus, AHE will provide participants opportunities and tools to conduct SOAR analysis and scenario planning throughout the life of their initiatives and directly integrate these activities into technical assistance programming.

The AHE TA team could co-create with teams high-level 1-page Care and Payment transformation summary sheets that include SOAR and SWOT-related information to guide our conversations and work of team members/partner organizations throughout the learning collaboratives. The summary documents can contain key AHE and team-specific messaging and reminders.

The summary documents can be revisited with teams to document progress and identify roadblocks, challenges and unforeseen opportunities that may arise over the course of implementation.



**/ Leading care, payment, and systems transformation**

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**ABOUT AHE**

Advancing Health Equity: Leading Care, Payment, and Systems Transformation (AHE) is a national program supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and based at the University of Chicago. AHE's mission is to discover best practices for advancing health equity by fostering payment reform and sustainable care models to eliminate health and healthcare inequities.

*The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.*