

An Introduction to Concept Mapping (CM)

One main activity of the strategic planning initiative is *concept mapping*. CM takes the ideas of individuals and combines them to form unique visual representations called *concept maps*. Participants representing a wide range of stakeholders will be involved in this process. The Concept System[®] approach will be utilized; it is both a software tool and a unique methodology used to ensure a well-informed, group-oriented, decision-making process.

The following steps are taken in a typical concept mapping process:

1. A focus question or statement is created to get participants to share their best ideas. Using the focus prompt, participants generate a wide array of ideas to address the topic.
2. Participants then organize ideas into categories to identify themes and patterns.
3. Participants provide input by rating ideas on scales, such as importance and feasibility or effectiveness and timeliness.
4. The Concept System[®] software takes the data from many individuals and, using several multivariate statistical algorithms, organizes that information and displays it in a series of easily readable concept maps. These maps show the relationships between ideas, the clustering of ideas into themes or issues, and the importance of ideas.
5. At an organizational meeting, participants interpret the maps, discuss the broader themes that the data suggest, and identify actions necessary to implement change.

The Concept Mapping Process asks participants to do **three activities:**

Brainstorming

The first step in the Concept Mapping process is to gather ideas about a specific focus. This is called the brainstorming phase. Participants will be presented with a focus statement to stimulate and direct their thinking. An example of a focus statement used in another public health-related project was, “*An action we should take in our state or region to eliminate disparities in health prevention and services delivery is...*” The brainstormed ideas will be submitted through a web page dedicated to this particular project (or by fax, if necessary). Participants may submit as many ideas as they wish.

Estimated Time to Complete: 15-20 minutes. The website will be available for participants for about 3 weeks.

Organizing/Sorting

The final statement list will be posted on a *sorting and rating* website, so that each participant selected to sort can organize the ideas into categories that make sense conceptually to him or her. **Estimated**

Time to Complete: 45-60 minutes

Rating

Participants will be invited to *rate* the list of ideas along one or more scales, such as “importance.”

Estimated Time to complete: 20-30 minutes

We will be providing more detailed information as we engage in this process.