



CANADIAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

Guide to Using SMART Objectives

By the CSLA's National Justice, Equity,
Diversity, and Inclusion Committee

Approved by the CSLA Board (March 2024)

Image: Belcher Archipelago, Courtesy of
NuALA for the CSLA Landscape Portfolio



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Introduction

SMART objectives are a fundamental tool in organizational management and goal setting. The acronym SMART stands for:

- Specific,
- Measurable,
- Achievable,
- Relevant, and
- Time-bound.

When used effectively, SMART objectives help organizations clarify their goals, focus their efforts, and track progress towards success. This guide will walk you through the process of creating and implementing SMART objectives within your organization.

This tool should be used at every opportunity, especially when goals are being established. For example:

- strategic planning;
- staff performance reviews;
- committee or board evaluations; and/or
- committee or project goal implementation.

In March 2024, the CSLA, in approving this guide, also approved a motion which commits to using SMART objectives in every aspect of its operations, whenever possible, such as the Strategic Plan, in setting performance goals for staff and in the action plans of the working committees. Additionally, the CSLA will encourage the use of SMART objectives with the Landscape Architecture Canada Foundation, and the provincial, territorial, and regional component associations.

Why is Using SMART Objectives Important to Achieving Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Objectives for CSLA, LACF and Component Associations?

Applying SMART objectives enhances their effectiveness by providing a clear and systematic approach to goal setting, implementation, and evaluation. This structured framework contributes to the success and sustainability of efforts aimed at promoting justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion within an organization.

Understand the Basics ---

Specific

Objectives should be clear and well-defined. Avoid vague or ambiguous language. Ask: What do we want to achieve?

Measurable

Objectives should include quantifiable criteria that allow you to track progress and determine when the goal is met. Ask: How will we measure success?

Achievable

Objectives should be realistic and attainable within the organization's resources and constraints. Ask: Is this goal feasible?

Relevant

Objectives should align with the organization's mission and strategic priorities. Ask: Is this goal worthwhile and in line with our mission?

Time-bound

Objectives should have a defined timeline (or deadline) for completion. Ask: When will we achieve this goal?

Involve Collaborators

Engage with key collaborators and partners to define and refine objectives. Their input ensures alignment with the organization's broader goals and helps identify potential challenges. Ask: Who will be involved in this objective, who will be affected by the decisions made, who can influence how the decisions are carried out, and what is their point of view?

Break Down Larger Goals

If a goal is substantial, break it down into smaller, more manageable objectives. This makes it easier to track progress and maintain focus.

Write SMART Objectives ---

Combine the five SMART criteria to formulate objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. For example:

Poor Objective: "Promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace."

SMART Objective: "Increase the representation of underrepresented groups in our profession by 20% within the next two years through targeted recruitment efforts, mentoring programs, and regular diversity and inclusion training for existing members."

When writing objectives, consider how it can be measured. Where does the data come from, how would be collected, is the data quantitative or qualitative? Answering these questions will help determine whether the objective is achievable.

Communicate Objectives

Share SMART objectives with all relevant team members and departments. Ensure everyone understands their role in achieving the objectives and how they contribute to the organization's success. For example, Strategic Plans, Action Plans, Operational Plans, and Performance Appraisals should all use SMART objectives. The use of this method also ensures that results can be communicated to partners, members, collaborators, and helps to build transparency with clarified objectives and managed expectations.

Develop an Action Plan

Create a detailed plan outlining the steps, resources, and responsibilities required to achieve each SMART objective. Include milestones, metrics, and deadlines.

Monitor Progress

Regularly track progress toward achieving SMART objectives. Use metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure success.

Adjust as Needed

If it becomes apparent that an objective is not realistic, or circumstances change, be prepared to adapt and adjust the objectives accordingly.

Celebrate Success

When objectives are met, celebrate the achievements, and acknowledge the contributions of the team. This fosters a culture of accomplishment and motivation.

Learn and Iterate

After each objective cycle, assess what worked and what didn't. Use this knowledge to improve the process for setting and achieving SMART objectives in the future.

Examples

Objective: Increase Diversity in Hiring

- SMART Goal: Increase the representation of underrepresented groups in the workforce by 15% within the next 12 months through targeted recruitment efforts, partnerships with diverse organizations, and inclusive hiring practices.

Objective: Foster Inclusive Leadership

- SMART Goal: Increase the number of underrepresented individuals in leadership positions by 20% over the next three years. Provide leadership training programs that focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and establish mentorship initiatives to support career advancement.

Objective: Enhance Member Training on Diversity and Inclusion

- SMART Goal: Implement mandatory diversity and inclusion training for all members, with a measurable increase in knowledge and awareness assessed through pre- and post-training evaluations. Achieve a minimum 15% improvement in members' understanding of diversity and inclusion within the next six months.

Objective: Create Inclusive Policies and Procedures

- SMART Goal: Review and revise existing policies to ensure they are inclusive and unbiased. Develop and communicate a set of updated, inclusive policies, and measure compliance through regular audits. Achieve 100% compliance within the next year.

Entrench the use of SMART Objectives in your Organization

- Ensure the staff, committees, task forces, working groups and your board establish SMART objectives in strategic, action and operational plans and performance appraisals.
- Ask your Board of Directors to approve a motion which commits to using SMART objectives throughout the entire organization.
- Communicate the use of SMART objectives using simple, positive, and non-technical language.

SMART objectives are a powerful tool for guiding an organization toward its goals. By following this guide and consistently applying the SMART criteria, your organization can increase its effectiveness, accountability, and overall success. Remember that the key to success lies in setting clear, measurable, and achievable objectives that align with your organization's mission and priorities.

Other Resources

Here is a list of websites and online resources that explain the use of SMART objectives:

- Mind Tools - SMART Goals: <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm>
- Indeed Career Guide - Setting SMART Goals: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/smart-goal>
- The Ultimate Guide to SMART Goals, Forbes: [The Ultimate Guide to S.M.A.R.T. Goals - Forbes Advisor](#)
- SMART Goals: A How-To Guide, Stanford University: <https://med.stanford.edu/content/dam/sm/spire/documents/How-to-write-SMART-Goals-v2.pdf>