

Chapter Four: Program Planning

4.1 Planning for Requirements

An ongoing challenge for the RAP is how to best meet the needs of all customers who request assistance and how to provide outreach services to those who are unfamiliar with assistance available. Many service centers have depleted resources that impact the decisions regarding “who, what, where” of service delivery. To maximize to the greatest extent possible the “return on investment,” program planning is an essential part of the decision making process in determining RAP service delivery.

4.1.1 Legislative and Policy Directives

Program planning for the RAP must first consider those guidelines provided in legislation and policy mandates. Although dedicated RAP personnel desire to expand their program offerings to meet emergent needs identified within their community, their mission must remain confined to meeting those relocation related needs currently stipulated in policy, particularly since the program is the recipient of “fenced funds” (discussed in Chapter Three). These legislative and policy requirements must remain in the forefront of all planning initiatives determining scope of Marine Corps programs and local service offerings. Program planning efforts must relate to the provision of destination area information, relocation assistance counseling, settling in services, and home finding services.

4.1.2 Phases of Relocation

Like their civilian counterparts, the needs of Marines and their family members will be driven by their unique individual characteristics and family composition. Assistance needed by Marines or their family members is also contingent upon which phase of relocation they are experiencing.

Phase One: *Pre-departure.* This phase is usually characterized by a period of focused logistical activity accompanied by both positive and negative feelings. The needs of Marines and family members are primarily geared toward the gathering of information related to the new duty station and surrounding community.

Phase Two: *Transition.* A short, energy-intensive period that includes actual departure and travel to the new installation. Feelings of both anxiety and enthusiasm are experienced. The needs of Marines and family members are primarily related to packing-out, shipment of household goods, temporary lodging, advance benefits and entitlements, housing, and arrangement and conduct of travel.

Phase Three: *Arrival and Orientation.* This period requires specific information and support to facilitate the segue into the new community. The needs of Marines and family members primarily relate to accessing healthcare, enrolling in schools, experiencing cultural shock, finding permanent lodging, and meeting basic physical necessities while waiting for household goods. Effective welcome and orientation programs are needed during this phase.

Phase Four: *Reconnect.* This phase usually occurs between two and six months post-arrival and involves adjustment and acclimation issues. A sense of disillusionment may be present as reality sets in. The needs of Marines and family members primarily relate to cultural adaptation, adjustment in to a new environment, relocation entitlement and benefits claims, and job hunting.

Phase Five: *Stabilization.* This is a productive phase when Marines and their family members are functioning within their community and their workplace. The needs of Marines and family members primarily relate to preparing for deployments and exercises, utilizing community resources and developing self-reliance. Feelings may reflect a holding pattern attitude while once again waiting for the next set of PCS orders.

Phase Six: *Re-entry*. This phase is associated with OCONUS (out of continental United States) to CONUS (continental United States) moves. The need for assistance for those going overseas is usually recognized, but repatriation can also be difficult. Most people simply do not anticipate problems when coming home. However, there are often feelings of guilt for not wanting to return to the states, as well as concrete problems such as financial issues. This phase is more compressed than the overseas culture shock adjustment but is no less intense and demanding.

In addition to standard and overseas moves, RAP personnel are encouraged to liaison with the Public Affairs Office to learn about the demographics of their base. Program planning should inherently include mission of the installation, average rank/rate or age of active duty personnel, number of reservists in the community, percentage of active duty who are deployed during any given time, percentage of off-base residents, number of Marines in surrounding area on Independent and Isolated (I&I) Duty, and approximate number of other DoD members located in the area who are eligible for base services.

Additionally, RAP personnel should make every effort to glean similar information from the surrounding civilian community, as well as supplemental information such as unemployment rates, poverty rates, number of businesses, average level of income and education, number of licensed day care facilities, ratio of law enforcement personnel to citizens and so forth. All data available to comprise a community profile should be considered in program planning to include on and off-base data.

4.1.3 Special Populations

Like their civilian counterparts, the military community is likely to have similar trends in the unique composition of families. RAP personnel should consider the unique needs of special populations assigned to their installation that are more susceptible to the negative impact of the mobile military lifestyle. By offering specialized services, those effected Marines have an opportunity to pursue a successful career at levels of performance and readiness consistent with the Marine Corps mission.

4.1.3.1 Single Parents

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, over 5,000 Marines are single parents. Varied duty hours, deployments, and frequent relocation can heighten stress and cause problems for single military parents. Because of their work schedule and domestic demands, accessing center-based services during normal hours may prove difficult. To help alleviate access issues for single parents or others who may find it difficult to visit a center, RAP personnel should consider having resources available electronically. One-on-one service provision can also be made available via the telephone and e-mail. Information most needed by single parents relates to childcare, healthcare, new parent home-based services, family housing, and personal finance.

4.1.3.2 Dual Career Couples

Dual career couples typically refer to those families where both are active duty military who may or may not be in the same branch of service. Within DoD, there are over 95,000 dual career couples and close to half of those have children. Within the Marine Corps, 5% of all members are in dual career military marriages; over 25% of female Marines are married to fellow service members. Dual career families face unique challenges primarily related to having a successful family life as well as a successful career, both of which are contingent upon receiving orders to installations in close proximity to one another. Since deployments and long duty hours are experienced by Marines, the needs of the dual career couples resemble those needs experienced by single parents. Information most needed by dual career couples relates to childcare to include both active duty priority assignments and 24-hour availability.

4.1.3.3 Working Spouses

As early as the 1980s, there was a growing concern by military leadership about the number of geographic bachelors (service members who relocated without their family members) since this particular population chose less often to become career service

members. One of the primary reasons reported for not relocating the family was the loss of a second income from spouse employment. Since that time, spouse employment has been a key issue for DoD leadership. Frequent relocations present challenges to working Marine Corps spouses, half of whom report being employed. Research shows that military family earnings are lower than civilian family earnings. One hypothesis is that the frequent moves of the military family lead to a lower wage equilibrium since moves alone account for an additional 2-6 weeks difference in the number of weeks worked between civilian and military spouses. A variety of services are available to assist spouses in achieving their career objectives. RAP personnel can coordinate with the employment and transition specialists located within M&FS to ensure accurate information is proactively disseminated to spouses who desire employment within the community.

4.1.3.4 Special Needs Families

Marine Corps special needs families reflect the diversity of the special needs community throughout the country. For military special needs families, the relocation process is even more complex since assignments take them from one special education program or health care provider to another, requiring the family to locate and initiate the required services and benefits all over again. Fortunately, the Marine Corps offers its members the opportunity to pursue assignment important to their career as determined by their military occupational specialty (MOS) while ensuring the family's needs can be met. The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), discussed further in Chapter Eight, ensures that families are assigned where special medical and educational needs can be met. Approximately 5,000 active duty Marines are enrolled in the EFMP. Those who have family members with more extensive needs are typically assigned to Category 4 bases where comprehensive treatments are available. RAP personnel should be aware of the composition of the special needs community aboard the installation and coordinate with the EFMP coordinator in program planning efforts.

4.1.3.5 Foreign Born Spouses

Marines with foreign born spouses may need special assistance to help their spouses adjust to the American way of life as well as to the military lifestyle. This long-term transition is compounded by lack of fluency in English which pervades every aspect of communication while maneuvering through the maze of available programs and services. Frequently, installation service providers are not aware of the existence of a foreign born spouse. Marketing efforts must be targeted to commands so that appropriate referrals may be made. RAP personnel are sometimes the first providers to become aware of a foreign born spouse. This is a critical point of service opportunity since the spouse may not “resurface” again until the next relocation. It is recommended that RAP personnel, in conjunction with other M&FS providers, have targeted information readily available for these opportune encounters. Information disseminated should relate to support groups, military spouses or non-military related international clubs, healthcare, pay and finances, English as a second language classes, identification cards, and available translation services. Specifically, Military OneSource offers translation services for numerous military educational materials (discussed further in Chapter Eight).

4.2 Needs Assessments

4.2.1 Purpose of Needs Assessments

A needs assessment is a community survey that solicits input from authorized patrons. Conducting a needs assessment may yield valuable information to help RAP personnel determine how to best meet policy requirements or to prioritize local program offerings. Information collected and assessed can relate to specific activities or services, location of service delivery, hours of operation, common obstacles preventing attendance or access, and so forth. To ascertain what a community needs in terms of services and support, an assessment can identify unique requirements specific to that locale. In addition to program planning, results of a needs assessment can assist RAP personnel to articulate future funding requirements.

Applying the results of needs assessments in planning allows for data-driven decisions to be made, vice an “intuitive” knowledge of what the community might need. In a culture of competitive resource requirements, data carries more weight when justifying a program initiative compared to anecdotal stories. Additionally, periodic surveying of the community can either confirm that current programming is meeting the needs or reveal different needs due to changing technology, culture, demographics, or mission.

4.2.2 Assessing Relocation Needs

Conducting large scale needs assessments is not realistic for local RAP personnel. Large scale assessments require a great deal of expertise and resources to produce useful results and are usually conducted at the headquarters level, regional level, or the local MCCA level. At the headquarters level, the program sponsor advocates for the inclusion of relocation related questions in OSD, Manpower & Reserve Affairs (M&RA) or other higher headquarters sponsored large scale survey. At the installation level, RAP personnel should work with their M&FS director to ensure an appropriate presence in a MCCA needs assessment or other base wide patron survey. Assessments usually include questions relating to service delivery to include

- location of facility
- facility access
- hours of operation
- perception of programs and services
- desire for programs and services
- preferred source for information or service delivery methodology
- patron or resident demographics

Another way to conduct a needs assessment is to conduct “point of service” (POS) surveys. Questions relating to the needs of RAP customers are provided when a service is rendered. For example, a hard copy of questions may be inserted into a WAP with instructions for completing and submitting the response, or the questionnaire may be

distributed and collected at the end of a workshop or brief. While POS surveys are not without drawbacks, namely the inability to project the results onto another population, they offer an extremely useful and efficient way to ascertain quick customer information.

4.3 Focus Groups

4.3.1 Purpose of Focus Groups

A focus group is an informal assembly of users whose opinions are requested about a specific topic. The goal is to elicit perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and ideas of participants about the topic. If a full-scale needs assessment or installation survey is beyond the reach of the RAP office, conducting periodic focus groups is an easy and inexpensive way to get quick information about what the target population thinks of the RAP and its relationship (or potential role) to their relocation challenges or moving experiences. Focus groups allow informal dialogue between the moderator and the group members as well as promote interaction between the group members resulting in a cohesion that generates more shared thoughts and ideas.

4.3.2 Conducting Focus Groups

Step One: Planning. Potential members of the group must be identified and invited to participate. A focus group can have as few as three and as many as 12 users participate, although the recommended number is five to six. RAP personnel may want to advertise for group members in the base paper or conduct a spontaneous focus group at the end of a community brief or workshop. Either way, members must be invited, not forced, to participate in the group. Whether verbal or written, the invitation should include the purpose of the focus group (e.g. “To better meet the relocation needs of Marines and their families”) and the time required. Time allotted depends on the number of questions or issues the facilitator wants to discuss. Meetings can last up to two hours but the facilitator will have a better response to the invitation if he or she plans to constrain the time to an hour or less. The facilitator should prepare a script of questions or list of issues that need to be addressed. Sample questions can be open-ended such as

- what was your last moving experience like?
- how are you preparing for your next moving experience?
- what aspects of the move did you find most challenging?
- what do you wished you had known?
- what kind of resources you think would be most helpful in the relocation process?

Or, questions can be “forced-choice response” such as

- what are the two most difficult challenges associated with moving?
- would you prefer to receive information in an individual counseling session or from a web site?
- if you had time to attend one relocation related workshop, would it be *Home Buying & Selling* or *Newcomers Orientation* (or “a brief about entitlements or a brief about your new community”)?
- what two things do you wish you had known prior to making your last move?

Both open-ended and forced-choice response questions have advantages and both types may be used. When preparing the questions, RAP personnel may consider partnering with another M&FS program and expand the scope of the focus group. If possible, plan to offer hospitality such as coffee or sodas to participants.

Step Two: Conducting. Create a friendly, relaxed atmosphere by creating small talk with the group members prior to beginning. When everyone is seated, thank them for their valuable time and make introductions. Ask the identified questions to the entire group and ensure that each participant has an opportunity to respond. It is the facilitator’s task to maintain the focus of the group, encourage discussion, obtain a range of opinions, and to communicate to the participants that each point of view is of interest. To promote more spontaneity in the group or during an interview, it is wise not to be too prescriptive but allow a free-flowing discussion, with appropriate boundaries, of the desired topic. In

addition to using pre-selected questions, a brainstorming exercise could also be conducted to help glean more information.

Step Three: Recording and reporting. If possible, it is extremely valuable to have a second person present during the group session to take notes and record answers. This could be done quietly in the back of the room or the recorder could take a more active role as a co-facilitator and openly record comments and answers on a paper chart. Accurate records of the focus group are important since the results may be used to enhance services or to present recommendations to leaders. Focus groups do not yield quantitative results that can be presented as representative of an entire population. However, the results of the focus group can be used as a basis for generating change in service delivery or validating needs of the target population.



KEY POINT

Conducting a focus group is a quick, easy and inexpensive way for RAP personnel to ascertain information about their target population. Information can relate to service delivery, customer needs, program requirements, and marketing trends.

4.4 Research and Studies

4.4.1 Purpose of Research and Studies

Incorporating research and studies into the planning process promotes validation of identified or projected requirements. Reliable research is usually conducted by professionals trained in research and evaluation. The military has assigned these functions to specific organizations, both within and outside of DoD.

4.4.2 Utilizing Data and Findings

Results of the Quality of Life Study in the U.S. Marine Corps should be incorporated into RAP programming as appropriate. The study measures the degree of satisfaction in specific life domains to include pay, housing, healthcare, benefits, family life, and MCCS programs. In addition to questions relating to mobility, RAP personnel need also to consider outcomes as they relate to income and standard of living since the RAP offers services directly tied to cost avoidance for Marines.

In the latest study, conducted in 2003, income and standard of living were the only domains where decreased satisfaction was reported. Also, those results related to housing should be considered since RAP may offer home finding services. The latest QOL study reported that satisfaction with base housing was “neutral” (demonstrates decrease since 1993/1998 baseline) whereas strong satisfaction was reported with off-base housing. Key drivers for housing satisfaction were condition and attractiveness over privacy, cost, and comfort. While Marines reported a high degree of commitment to the Marine Corps and a felt a strong sense of accomplishment, they also reported working longer hours than in 1998 (QoL Study 2003).

RAP and other quality of life programs can use this key information in programming by endeavoring to reduce the number of lost duty hours a Marine may experience when planning a PCS move or other military-driven event requiring personal assistance. The 2003 QoL Study also revealed that the higher the pay grade, the more satisfied the respondents were with relocation, while the number of relocations had no effect on satisfaction. This data might be used to justify more programming for junior Marines and their families.

OSD periodically funds research specifically designed to study mobility. For example, OSD sponsored a PCS Cost Analysis Study in 1999 that looked at the true cost of a military related move for an average military member and family. This study revealed that up to one-third of total relocation expenses are non-reimbursable, out-of-pocket

expenses. The results also indicated that those who use relocation services were reimbursed a higher proportion of allowable expenses than those who did not use services. Financial incentives (savings, cost avoidance) can be used as a marketing tool for RAP programs as well as justification for needed program resources.

OSD also sponsors the DoD Active Duty Status of Forces Survey, last conducted in 2002 with over 38,000 officers and enlisted members. This most recent survey resulted in respondents reporting a high degree of job satisfaction as it relates to military values, but less than half (29%) were satisfied with housing, pay (38%), and military family support programs (41%). These satisfaction levels are higher than those reported in the 1999 study with the exception of spouse employment where only 32% reported satisfaction. The study also found that half of military personnel experienced PCS-related financial problems such as loss or decrease of spouse income, spouse employment, or change in cost of living.

Manpower & Reserve Affairs (M&RA), HQMC, also sponsors research and studies on manpower trends within the Marine Corps which may also have applicability to RAP and other quality of life services. For example, the Marine Corps Exit & Retention Survey is now conducted on a regular basis and includes quality of life domains. RAP personnel are encouraged to liaison with their MR program sponsor to distribute the applicable results when they are made available.

Another source for government research is the Government Accounting Office (GAO). The GAO conducts numerous military-related research studies and analysis throughout the year, some of which may have applicability in the military quality of life arena. Their web site, www.gao.gov/, offers a search capability to locate those studies that relate to military human resources, manpower trends, and quality of life issues. Visitors can also register to receive e-mails announcing the release of a study.

RAP personnel are also encouraged to communicate with their M&FS and MCCS leadership to ascertain results of assessments, evaluations, or surveys that have been conducted locally. Findings from all available sources can be used proactively to justify resources, provide validity for future funding requirements, to elevate relocation related concerns, and to engage in local strategic planning.

4.5 Strategic Planning

4.5.1 Purpose of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a management tool utilized to help an organization do a better job. A strategic plan helps focus an organization's energy, ensures members of the organization are working toward the same goals, and adjusts direction in response to a changing environment or emerging needs. A strategic plan is not just for corporate or revenue generating agencies; it has extensive applicability for government and other non-profit agencies who are interested in maximizing their resources and achieving both their short and long term objectives. It provides a "road map" for the future by identifying goals, objectives, resources, and desired outcomes. Strategic planning can be conducted at all levels of an organization.

Typically, a large-scale plan is generated at the corporate or board level, serving as overarching long-term guidance that cascades throughout the organization and drives functional strategic planning at the local level. For example, the MCCS directors conducted a Marine Corps-wide strategic planning session resulting in the development of the MCCS Strategic Plan which was approved by the board of directors and contains the organization's mission and goal.

MCCS MISSION

Provide fitness/recreation programs, personal services, and business activities in direct support of individual and family readiness and retention.

MCCS VISION

Make a difference in the lives of our Marines, Sailors, and families by doing the right things the right way.

These two guiding principles serve as the foundation for all goals and objectives for MCCS programs and services. At the installation level a MCCS director may also have a strategic plan in place that further defines goals and objectives for those programs, services, and employees under his or her purview in support of the MCCS or installation commander's strategic plan.

Strategic planning is never finished. The plan serves as a planning tool with clear and measurable objectives. As requirements change or as objectives are met, the plan should continue to evolve in response to those environmental or situational changes. Measuring the outcome of a strategic plan is discussed further in Chapter Five.

4.5.2 Conducting Strategic Planning

At a minimum, RAP personnel should participate in strategic planning on an annual basis. This could be part of the organizational M&FS planning process or could be a more informal RAP office function. However it is done, there is no single perfect way to conduct planning; rather, there are numerous effective ways that can be employed to write a plan. A common model and associated processes are described here.

Step One. *Strategic Analysis.* This function involves evaluating the climate of both the organization (employees, resources, etc.) and the needs of the customer. This is a “global” look at RAP and its relationship with both internal customers and external customers. Strategic analysis is predicated partially on data previously derived from needs assessments, focus groups, and available customer demographics. To provide structure during a strategic analysis, some planners use the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) method to brainstorm ideas. The SWOT process

is designed for team members to do a quick, realistic assessment of the pros and cons of the current state of their program.

- Strengths could include available resources, surplus in funding, dedicated staff, responsive customers, supportive commands, etc.
- Weaknesses identified might include budget cuts, gapped billets, lack of marketing initiatives, “old” resources, lack of sufficient time or technology to implement program improvements, etc.
- Opportunities may be an area or objective that is made available to RAP staff relating to environmental changes such as increased PCS moves or increased deployments, as well as internal opportunities such as the strategic planning session itself.
- Threats refer to issues or circumstances that might prevent the execution of program planning. Threats may include base closures, reorganization or realignment of staff, change of installation mission, etc.

Facilitators of strategic planning must ensure that team members stay on track and offer positive comments that will help the team move through this phase of strategic planning. While it is preferable to have a group session to conduct a SWOT, this may also be done electronically prior to meeting. Either way, it is important that all key personnel have an opportunity to provide their comments and input. The realistic assessment resulting from the SWOT will provide the foundation for the next step in strategic planning.

Step Two. *Setting strategic direction.* Once the group has evaluated available information and generated the “as is” state of the RAP, the next step is to identify those goals the RAP would like to achieve within a year (or two years). Setting strategic direction is the identifying of realistic, attainable, and measurable goals that have a clear connection to the mission of the MCCS and M&FS. Goals are not those statements that reflect current accomplishments but should reflect a new, desired “to be” state of

programs. Goals should be realistic, attainable, and measurable. Sample goals might include

- increase the number of people served
- maximize available resources
- decrease administrative tasks
- increase skills of employees

Step 3. Action planning. Once goals have been identified, the next step is to lay out how the goals will be accomplished and what objectives (or strategies) will be employed. One goal may have as few as one objective or as many as half a dozen. There is no set rule as long as both the goal and the objectives are future oriented, realistic, obtainable, and measurable. Tactics are methods needed to reach an objective.

Sample 1

Goal: Increase the number of people served

Objective: Increase RAP marketing initiatives

Tactic # 1: Meet with MCCA or base marketing to build a relationship, learn about marketing, and identify potential techniques

Tactic # 2: Participate in installation-wide transition fair

Tactic # 3: Increase the number of unit briefs and installation workshops

Sample 2

Goal: Maximize available resources

Objective: Increase utilization of local professional partners

Tactic #1: Schedule courtesy calls or marketing meetings with other providers aboard the installation to evaluate potential for joint service delivery, sharing of resources, and referrals

Tactic #2: Schedule courtesy calls or marketing meetings with off-base service providers to evaluate resource and referral potential

Sample 3

Goal: Stay abreast of current relocation and human service delivery trends

Objective: All RAP personnel engage in professional development activities

Tactic #1: Advocate for conference funding to support Employment Relocation Council (ERC), Families in Global Transition, or comparable conference

Tactic #2: Enroll in civilian leadership courses

Tactic #3: Attend applicable MCCS training

Sample 4

Goal: Increase one-on-one RAP service delivery

Objective: Decrease administrative duties

Tactic #1: Automate lending locker functions

Tactic #2: Use electronic Individual Relocation Plan (IRP)

Tactic #3: Organize customer resources

The notional goals, objectives, and tactics cited above are all realistic, obtainable, and measurable. After this step, the group is ready to prepare an executable plan. Action planning also includes specifying responsibilities, timelines, and methods.

4.5.3 Plan of Action and Milestones

A plan of action may be called a variety of names such as work plan, operational plan, management plan, performance plan, and so forth. A Plan of Action and Milestones (POA&M) is a term frequently heard within the military community and one that most are acquainted with. The development and internal distribution of a POA&M ensures that the RAP strategies have been documented and communicated to all applicable personnel to include RAP personnel and M&FS leadership. A sample POA&M can be found at attachment 4-1.



KEY POINT

The Marine Corps RAP continues to plan programs and services relevant to the relocating Marine and his or her family members. The goals and objectives established by all levels of leadership must connect to and support the Marine Corps mission of *Making Marines and Winning Wars*.