

Note: The following challenges and tips are based on the experience of local coalitions who participated in AFSI pilot programs. Planning challenges presented incorporate issues pilot sites faced throughout the planning process and are discussed throughout the remainder of this Master Planning section. For details, see the Lessons Learned included throughout the AFSI Toolkit.

Challenge: Prioritizing asthma among other health issues in schools

Tip: Highlight data, including absenteeism. According to CDC, on average, students with asthma are absent three to five more days per year than students without asthma and some students are absent much more.

Tip: Work with other chronic disease organizations to address systems changes that apply to all chronic disease vs. just asthma. Systems changes that work for asthma will generally work well for other chronic conditions the schools deal with like Diabetes, seizures, and food allergies.

Challenge: Lack of asthma data, particularly school- or district-specific data

Tip: Use the AFSI process as a mechanism for gathering specific data. Utilize the AIR database at a pilot school to determine the burden of asthma (see page 101 of this toolkit).

Tip: Contact state asthma program coordinator about new and pending data collection activities.

Tip: Use the School Health Index to establish baseline information. Future use of the SHI will help to show improvement.

Challenge: Coalition members not closely involved with project

Tip: Agree on specific tasks with clear areas of responsibility and deadlines.

Tip: Identify those who are best utilized as “advisors” and ask them for recommendations for other representatives from their organization to work as part of planning work group, etc.

Tip: Recognize member accomplishments and celebrate successes.

Challenge: High-level school decision-makers not involved

Tip: Recruit a school board member to join coalition and possibly to participate actively in long-term planning work group.

Tip: Secure superintendent involvement in advisory role, to help inform planning and implementation; ultimately, this will support implementation.

Tip: Include as many school decision-makers as possible in needs assessment, using assessment process as first point of AFSI promotion.

Tip: Involve the school district lead nurse. Include the lead in the needs assessment, stakeholder meetings and perhaps AFSI planning work group.

Tip: Keep state school nurse coordinator actively involved in AFSI coalition; include the coordinator in needs assessment.

Tip: Involve school district manager of health services. Include the manager in the needs assessment, stakeholder meetings and perhaps AFSI planning work group.

Challenge: Need greater involvement of school nurses

Tip: Involve them in school needs assessment; request their input for your assessment and try to recruit nurses as leads within each school during needs assessment process.

Tip: Recruit school nurse into AFSI planning work group.

Tip: Present 5-Year AFSI Plan at state school nurses' conference.

Tip: Pitch article about the 5-Year AFSI Plan to state school nurses' newsletter or magazine.

Challenge: Need involvement of health care providers

Tip: Include them in needs assessment, using assessment process as the first point of promotion for AFSI.

Tip: Invite local health care leaders to stakeholder meetings

Challenge: Need for more parent involvement

Tip: Network through school-based parent organizations, school nurses, and other staff with whom you have existing relationships to identify parents of children with asthma who may be interested in getting involved.

Tip: Include as many parents as possible in your survey sample during your needs assessment. Include a question on survey tools or during interviews about parent interest in working on AFSI.

Tip: Invite PTO/PTA leaders to your stakeholder meeting(s) where you present needs assessment findings and define the long-term AFSI plan.

Challenge: Lack of expertise writing survey/assessment tools and difficulty finding good existing survey(s)

Tip: Consider using the School Health Index as your needs assessment survey tool. This validated tool contains asthma questions and is used by schools for other needs assessment processes. The schools may already be familiar with the forms and the process.

Tip: Sample surveys are included as reference materials at the back of Action Step 2.

Tip: Web-based survey tools are available. Check into www.surveymonkey.com and others.

Tip: Recruit a university-based researcher to write assessment tools (and help analyze and prioritize results).

Challenge: Low rate of participation in needs assessment (surveys, etc.)

Tip: Use incentives. Examples used by pilot sites included gift certificates, free movie tickets, a free shopping trip to the teacher supply store, and even posters for the classroom.

Tip: Make sure you plan your needs assessment around the school calendar. Completion of the needs assessment is much more likely when it is convenient for school personnel to participate.

Tip: Make sure you have high level school administrative support on your planning team. This will help to ensure the schools participation in a needs assessment process. Support from the Board of Education or Superintendent can be key to ensuring completion.

Challenge: Need to integrate evaluation and identify outcomes with planning

Tip: Recruit a public health professional with specific planning and evaluation experience to work with your AFSI planning work group.

Tip: Take each prioritized need documented and in your needs assessment report and create a planning grid (see sample) that detail year-by-year measurements (indicators and data sources) for each outcome defined.

Challenge: School calendars and coalition timelines conflict

Tip: Increase timeframe for planning, working back from the school calendar.

Tip: Plan activities according to 9-month school calendar to allow for more school personnel involvement.