



Do You Have a Road Map?



*Integrated Oncology Consulting Solutions
And Cancer Care Center Planning*

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When planning a road trip, you may look at a map to determine the most efficient route, or you might pick a scenic route. Either way, navigating is easy now—just program your trip into your GPS and follow the directions to your destination.

If only it were that easy for everything. Cancer program administrators are expected to navigate the clinical, administrative and business aspects of their program to ensure it grows each year. In order to be successful in today's competitive environment, you need a strategic plan to serve as the map that guides your near- and long-term decisions on budgets, facilities, staffing, technology, equipment and overall growth.

If your program operates on a calendar year budget, you're probably starting the process of submitting capital requests and a new operating budget to your boss. If you work at an organization that follows the academic year, what were your results for the first month of the fiscal year? You may have specific goals for a budget year, but do you have a multi-year plan to guide growth and program development for the next three to five years?

Capital projects, whether they're replacements of current equipment or acquisitions of new technology, are expensive. If your equipment is end-of-life or is not capable of providing the cutting-edge treatments that patients expect, it may be easier to get approval for your project. Lead times are key. For example, say you need to replace a linear accelerator. Where will your patients go for treatment while you're replacing the current machine, which can take six months or more? If you want to acquire new technology, does your organization require a cost-benefit analysis as well as pro formas for the revenue and expenses associated with the new program? How long will those take, and who will do them?

A new building or renovation of existing space is another type of capital project that sometimes spans multiple budget years. This type of project requires a vision for the program and forecasting of patient volumes. Support and input from departments as diverse as finance, engineering, construction and facilities, as well as environmental services, are essential for a successful design, construction and opening. We at The Oncology Group also believe that eliciting input from patients and caregivers is essential to the design of new space, and we encourage program administrators to establish an advisory council to accomplish that, if one isn't already in place.

A strategic plan also enables your program to prioritize physician recruitment. The need to recruit can arise from program growth, expected retirements or unexpected resignations. Typically, the lead time for recruiting physicians for all programs is long, but it can be affected by your program's location. A good plan includes an assessment of the physicians associated with your program, outlines a process for recruiting new ones and specifies a contingency plan for what to do if someone leaves. To diminish any disruption caused by a change in leadership, it's essential to have a leadership succession plan for your entire program as well as any specialized programs you may develop.

So how do you create a strategic plan? The first step in the process is to assess your current situation. Is your program growing or have your patient volumes been stagnant for the last couple of years? What is the cancer incidence in your market, and what is your market share for all cancers as well as specific cancers? Is the population in your market growing, declining or expected to stay stable in the next five

years? Do you dominate the market or are you in a competitive market? How do you differentiate your program if the market is competitive and each program has similar technology and accreditations? An assessment from an objective third party can compare your program to the local market and report on trends and observations about what is happening across the country.

The second step requires a vision for your program. You now understand where your program is today, but you need to have an honest discussion of where the program will be tomorrow. There are multiple organization models for cancer programs, and your leadership must decide if they will partner with other community-based programs, academic programs, or solo/multi-specialty practices or if they'll continue to operate as a stand-alone program. Physicians, clinical staff, front line staff, administrative leadership and the advisory council should all participate in the visioning process so that the final decisions have buy-in from all levels of your organization as well as the patients and caregivers whom you'll be serving.

The third step is developing actionable steps for the evolution of your program and the execution of the plan. Create a schedule that determines the timing of investments, the development of new programs, and the recruitment of physicians and clinical support staff. Include a schedule of who will be responsible, the time frame for the specific project and any specific metrics associated with determining the success of the project. This step may require legal agreements to formalize the relationship between different organizations or programs. The program for the future may also require fundraising to provide support for capital projects.

Having a strategic plan will help guide your cancer program according to your vision. At The Oncology Group, we have an all-star team of experienced professionals that includes physician, nursing and administrative leadership at both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Our consultants are prepared to help your program develop a well-thought-out, integrated and comprehensive guide to expanding, improving and succeeding in this changing environment. And in addition to strategic planning, we're experts in revenue recovery and patient-centered programs, since we're well-versed in all aspects of oncology. For more information, please contact The Oncology Group at info@theoncologygroup.com or 512-583-8815.