

The Rhode Island State Guide Plan:

How to Prepare and Maintain a State Guide Plan Element

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The Statewide Planning Program, Rhode Island Department of Administration, is established by Chapter 42-11 of the *General Laws* as the central planning agency for state government. The work of the Program is guided by the State Planning Council, comprised of state, local, and public representatives and federal and other advisors.

The objectives of the Program are: (1) to prepare strategic and systems plans for the state; (2) to coordinate activities of the public and private sectors within this framework of policies and programs; and (3) to advise the Governor and others concerned on physical, social, and economic topics.

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Introduction – What is the State Guide Plan?

The State Guide Plan is Rhode Island's centralized and integrated long-range, usually 20 year, planning document. It comprises many separately published elements covering a range of topics.

This handbook is intended to assist those within the Statewide Planning Program or in other agencies who are writing or updating Guide Plan elements. It states how plans are used, defines key terms, notes plan contents, summarizes the steps in plan development, and describes some tests of a plan's quality. This guidance will help explain the State Guide Plan process to those unfamiliar with it, make it more meaningful, and promote a high degree of quality and consistency among the elements.

The State Guide Plan was established by the Rhode Island General Law 42-11-10 (7)(d), which states:

State guide plan. The state guide plan shall be comprised of functional elements or plans dealing with land use; physical development and environmental concerns; economic development; energy supply, access, use, and conservation; human services; and other factors necessary to accomplish the objective of this section. **The state guide plan shall be a means for centralizing and integrating long-range goals, policies, and plans.** State agencies concerned with specific subject areas, local governments, and the public shall participate in the state guide planning process, which shall be closely coordinated with the budgeting process.

The State Planning Council, also established by statute, is a publicly appointed body with the power to adopt, amend, and repeal elements of the State Guide Plan. The Council is advised by the Technical Committee, a State Planning Council appointed body representing a range of technical skills and policy perspectives. The Office of Statewide Planning serves as the staff agency in the preparation and monitoring of various plans for the state. While other State agencies have always participated in the preparation and maintenance of Guide Plan elements; recently, outside agencies with particular expertise have played a larger role in drafting and revising State Guide Plan elements. It is critical, however, that the work of outside agencies is closely coordinated with the Statewide Planning Program which is charged with responsibility for the Guide Plan overall.

Over the three decades since the State Guide Plan was mandated a collection of 30 elements have been adopted (see table next page). The Guide Plan provides a degree of continuity and permanent policy direction for the state's future development. The policies within these plans are intended to be consistent and Statewide Planning Program is responsible for checking for any inconsistencies among plans and resolving them where possible.

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State Guide Plan Elements
(as of June 2003)

	Title	Element Number	Date Adopted or Amended
1	Goals and Policies	110	November 1974
2	Resources Management in the Reuse of Surplus Navy Lands	112	April 1979
3	State Land Use Policies and Plan	121	June 1989
4	Scituate Reservoir Watershed Management Plan	125	December 1990
5	Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor	131	September 1990
6	Rhode Island State Historical Preservation Plan	140	June 1996
7	Ocean State Outdoors: RI's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan	152	March 2003
8	A Greener Path: Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future	155	November 1994
9	Urban and Community Forestry Plan	156	May 1999
10	Forest Resources Management Plan	161	June 1984
11	Rhode Island Rivers Policy and Classification Plan	162	January 1998
12	Rhode Island Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan	171	November 1996
13	Economic Development Policies and Plan	211	April 2000
14	Industrial Land Use Plan	212	August 2000
15	State Housing Plan	421	March 2000
16	Transportation 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan	611	August 2004
17	Transportation System Management Plan	620	Repealed August 2004
18	Policy Statement: Proposals for New or Restructured Public Transit Facilities or Service	621	January 1987
19	State Airport System Plan	640	December 1992
20	Waterborne Transportation Plan	651	August 1998
21	Rhode Island Freight Rail Plan	661	June 1993
22	Transportation Element of the State Implementation Plan for Air Quality	691	Repealed August 2004
23	Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for Narragansett Bay	715	October 1992
24	Water Supply Policies for Rhode Island	721	September 1997
25	Water Supply Plan for Rhode Island	722	December 1991
26	Water Emergency Response Plan	723	May 1993
27	Drought Management Plan	724	June 2002
28	Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Plan	731	October 1995
29	Rhode Island Energy Plan	781	August 2002
30	Howard Center Master Plan, Phase 1	912	October 1994

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How the State Guide Plan is Used

The State Guide Plan has four functions. It sets long-range policy (generally twenty years), provides a means to evaluate and coordinate projects or proposals of state importance, sets standards for local comprehensive plans, and serves as a general background information source on various topics.

Plans as State Policy Directives

At its most ambitious, the elements of the State Guide Plan establish broad goals for the state's future, and set proactive policy directives. These policies are backed up in the Plan elements with objectives to set meaningful measures toward attainment, and strategies to advance implementation. The creation, adoption, and maintenance of a functional element provides a unique opportunity for all state entities and their various constituencies to be involved in setting these policy directives. This process seeks to ensure that issues have been thoroughly researched, options have been evaluated, and policies are consistent with other plans.

Plans as a Tools to Evaluate and Coordinate Projects of State Importance

The State Guide Plan is as standard by which specific projects or proposals are evaluated for consistency with state goals, objectives, and policies. There are a several variations of this function. Some involve only state agencies while others involve the interaction of federal or local agencies with the state. Items that are checked for consistency with the State Guide Plan include:

- direct federal projects within the state
- proposals requesting federal funds
- applications for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits
- Environmental Impact Statements
- Economic Development Corporation projects
- projects being reviewed by the Energy Facility Siting Board
- applications for various loans, grants, or other funding coming from state financing
- rules and regulations promulgated by state agencies
- property leases and conveyances proposed before the State Properties Committee

Plans as Tools to Assure Consistency of Local Plans

The *Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act*, enacted in 1988, requires every Rhode Island city and town to adopt a Comprehensive Plan. Each local Comprehensive Plan is required to be consistent with the State Guide Plan. The State Guide Plan serves both as a guidance document to municipalities as they formulate their individual Comprehensive Plans and subsequently as one of the standards by which the State determines whether or not to approve the local plans, updates, and amendments to those plans. The programs and projects of state agencies must conform to *State-approved* local plans.

Plans as a Sources of Information

An informal but important role for the State Guide Plan elements is as an information resource. The process of writing a plan usually involves a significant amount of background research. Typically, a plan will present a considerable amount of data, factual findings, problem identification and analysis of various courses of action that then lead to recommending certain policies and actions.

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Defining Key Terms

The fact that the State Guide Plan is really a compilation of many plans, written by many authors, and written at many different time periods, makes a confusion of terminology all too probable. "Goals", "policies", "objectives" and other terms are used in a wide variety of ways, sometimes interchangeably, and sometimes meaning very different things to different people. Here is a standardized definition to guide the writing of an element. These definitions should be included in the element's glossary to ensure clarity.

Key Terms Found in a Plan

Vision:

A statement or statements that crystallize an overarching ideal that is easily remembered and, hopefully, inspiring. Vision has intrinsic appeal that helps unify support for the plan.

Goal:

The end or ideal that is desired. It is a state or value toward which an effort is directed even though it may not necessarily be attainable. Goal statements are broad in scope, long-term in nature but should not be vague.

Objective:

Like a goal, an objective is an end toward which an effort is directed. An objective, however, should be *measurable* and *attainable*. Objectives are stated in more narrow and specific terms than goals and may be set within definite time periods and establish performance measures.

Policy:

Policies are intended to guide decisions and courses of action toward implementing a plan. Policies are not an endpoint but set forth the acceptable and recommended procedures for attaining goals and objectives.

Strategy:

A specific action suggested as a recommendation that will further the advancement toward a goal or objective. Other terms such as *recommendation* or *action* have at times been used as a synonym but so as to avoid confusion they should not be used as headings in SGP elements.

Here are a couple of examples to help illustrate:

Example #1: This example is adapted from State Guide Plan Element 211: *Economic Development Policies and Plan*.

Goal – To foster and maintain a vigorous economy able to provide an adequate number and variety of activities that generates wealth for the people of the state.

Objective – Provide at least 34,200 new employment opportunities for Rhode Island residents, by the year 2020, achieving and maintaining full employment and reducing underemployment.

Policy - Improve opportunities for productive employment with highest priority given to those economic development activities that have the potential to upgrade the skill and wage levels of

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the state's resident labor force. Target public economic development assistance of any type to those applicants that can increase the average wage rate in their industrial sectors.

Strategy – Award additional points to proposals being scored for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy's Project Priority List that have the potential to upgrade the skill and wage levels of the labor force

Example #2: For writing a plan to preserve open space in Rhode Island, what might an appropriate vision-to-strategy hierarchy look like?

Vision: – A statewide system of connecting greenspaces and greenways, a network made up of critical natural and cultural resources, outdoor recreation facilities, public spaces, community and urban forests, and private open spaces. The greenspace system is to be Rhode Island's permanent green framework within which the state's communities will design and build in the 21st century.

Goal – Create a statewide network of greenspaces and greenways to serve as the central organizing element for the state's growth and physical development.

Objective – One-third of the state's land area shall be protected greenspace by the year 2020.

Policy – Direct new growth and development to areas and locations that minimize the potential for negative impacts upon the greenspace system.

Strategy – Provide incentives for reuse of former industrial and mill sites.

State Planning Council Actions

State Guide Plan elements are products of the State Planning Council which may act to:

Adopt:

Accept a new State Guide Plan element.

Amend:

Accept changes to a previously adopted element. Amendments can be comprehensive or limited.

- Comprehensive amendments involve a reappraisal of data, analyses, and strategies of an element conducted to reflect changing conditions. Implementation objectives and strategies are updated as appropriate.
- Limited amendments incorporate changes to address new requirements but do not involve a comprehensive reassessment.

Repeal:

Remove of an element from the State Guide Plan when it is no longer relevant or the content has been substantially covered by other, newer elements.

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Contents of a State Guide Plan Element

Cover/Title Page – including: report title, number, date month and year of adoption, element number, and organizational authors.

Credit Notation – A page explaining legal authority for the State Guide Plan, where to get copies and credit for the cover graphics, if any.

Abstract – The abstract should explain the legal authority for the element, whether it is a new plan or a revision and the reason for the revisions. This page should also include the title, number, subject, agency/source of copies and number of pages.

Listing of Reviewers – A member list of the State Planning Council, the Technical Committee and the advisory committee established for the plan's review.

Preface – A brief introduction to the plan's intent purpose and content. Acknowledgements are also included in this section. In some elements, this section can serve as an Executive Summary.

Table of Contents –

- *Chapter or "Part" List*¹.
- *List of Tables, Figures and Maps* – Tables, figures and maps should be used to illustrate key points in the plan and to provide backup data as necessary. Maps should be prepared in cooperation with the RI Geographic Information System (RIGIS).
- *Appendix List* – Appendices are often used to provide space for detailed supporting data listings or copies of relevant legal materials. Appendices can also be effectively used to describe in detail issues discussed within the plan.

Body – (see description on next page)

Bibliography – Though not required as part of a plan, a bibliography provides an opportunity to refer users of the plan to sources of information that may be helpful in understanding the policies or implementing the objectives of the plan.

Glossary – While also not a required element of a plan, a glossary is a useful tool. The development and inclusion of a glossary helps ensure that plan developers agree on the meaning of key words and phrases and the glossary can serve as a useful resource for those interested in the element's topic.

Footnotes – Citations of reference material and detailed notes should be footnoted throughout the body.

Index – Some plans contain indices to key items within the body of the text. The inclusion of an index to goals, policies and objectives facilitates using the plan to check for consistency with other plans and proposed projects and is recommended.

¹ Guide Plan element pagination is described in the Statewide Planning Program's Procedures Manual.

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Appendices – As described above, the appendices can provide information to support the body of the plan and to provide tools to explore and understand ideas discussed in the body.

The Body of a State Guide Plan Element

I. Executive Summary

This summary can be a stand-alone document. Its purpose is to provide a quick reference for the plan's vision, goals, and policies.

II. Inventory & Analysis

Purpose & Context – This section notes the legislative or other authorities for the creation of the plan. It also creates the physical, socio-economic, and organizational context for the plan among all of the State Guide Plan elements.

Existing Conditions – Elements should document relevant data on resources, needs, constraints, and opportunities to provide a foundation for enduring, long-range goals and policies. Plan updates should address changes in this inventory data. The conditions discussion should generally be statewide but may include the broader New England or national context or narrower substate data if appropriate.

Inventory of Key Issues and Analysis – Plan recommendations should be based on an inventory of assets and public needs and preferences. The performance of the preceding plan should be evaluated in any revision or update. Long-range trends on needs, preferences, economics, and resources should be evaluated, and forecasts provided, where possible. This discussion should precede discussion of future goals and objectives.

III. The Plan

Vision – The plan's vision should be stated as a part of the transition between existing conditions and the analysis of where the state should head in the future.

Goals and Policies – Goals and policies should be identified to guide actions towards attainment of the plan's vision. Other Guide Plan elements should be consulted as appropriate to avoid duplication, and ensure consistency of proposed new goals and policies with those previously established.

IV. Implementation

Objectives and strategies – Objectives and strategies (recommended actions) needed to advance the Plan's goals must be identified in the implementation section. Both long-term objectives (measurable wherever possible) and more immediate strategies must be listed. Responsible parties, funding or resource needs, timelines, and evaluation measures should be identified or estimated for each objective. A matrix or table may be used to present or summarize the implementation program. Ideally plans should also discuss what should happen if the goals of the plan are not met.

Note: Citations of reference material and detailed notes should be footnoted throughout the body.

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How To Draft or Revise a State Guide Plan Element

Step One: Determine scope of work, roles, and responsibilities

Drafting or comprehensively updating an element itself requires a plan. If the lead agency is the Statewide Planning Program, personnel time and the scope of work are written into the annual work program that is adopted by the State Planning Council. If an outside agency takes the lead, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) will be developed by the agency and the Statewide Planning Program and accepted by the State Planning Council. The MOU will specify the objectives, scope, general content, and maintenance resources and requirements for the guide plan element of concern. The lead agency and the Statewide Planning Program shall agree to schedules, planning processes, and procedures necessary. The Statewide Planning Program shall have final say over the content and format of state guide plan elements.

Step Two: Identify and Engage Stakeholders and the Public

The State Guide Plan's purpose is to centralize and integrate long-range goals, policies, and plans. It is therefore incumbent upon drafters of individual elements to bring together stakeholders into advisory groups as early in the process as practical. These groups typically include other state agencies, local officials, non-profit organizations, academics, and private citizens having interest or expertise in the field. The membership of advisory committees shall be developed with line agencies, and shall be approved by the State Planning Council. As the plan is written, especially to the extent that consensus is reached about its content, the committee members become advocates for the plan and stewards for its implementation. The committee is usually convened and staffed by the state entity responsible for the drafting of the plan, though sometimes consultants may fulfill this role. The drafting or amending process must involve the general public through the use of mail or phone surveys, focus groups, workshops, or other means.

Step Three: Drafting

The drafting process may vary considerably depending on the nature of the topic, extent of update required, specific uses for the plan, and whether what is required is a new plan, or comprehensive or limited amendments. (Note that updates to current plans should use those plans as a basis for any work – changes in goals and objectives should only be made when supported by an analysis of changes in underlying data.) In general, language and supporting material is crafted by staff, sometimes with consultant support, and reviewed by an advisory committee. For plans where there are significant technical or policy issues it may be well to have meetings and research focused on particular issues before any formal drafting begins. The drafting process should employ valid and current data, well-documented sources, and professionally accepted planning methodologies. Statewide Planning staff will be assigned to the process in part to ensure consistency with other State Guide Plan elements.

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Step Four: Review and Comment

Estimated Timeline for Formal Review Process

Days	Review and Adoption Step	Document Status
90	Review by Statewide Planning	Agency draft
14	Sending Draft to Technical Committee	Preliminary Draft
60	Review by Technical Committee (3 meetings)	" "
21	Acceptance for Hearing by State Planning Council	Public Hearing Draft
1	Public Hearing	" " "
30	Hearing Report Drafted and Sent to Planning Council	Revised Final Draft
14	Plan Adopted by State Planning Council	Adopted Plan
230	TOTAL	

After the advisory committee and lead agency has a draft with which they are satisfied, the formal review process begins. State Guide Plan elements are reviewed by Statewide Planning Program staff, the Technical Committee and the State Planning Council. This process requires a minimum of six months. The process starts when the lead agency submits paper and electronic copies of the draft to the Statewide Planning Program staff. Statewide Planning will then certify assure that the draft is consistent with other State Guide Plan elements. The staff also reviews for comprehensiveness, format, style, and organization of the Plan. When the draft is satisfactory, the lead agency will be scheduled to present the draft to the Technical Committee at their next meeting. It may be necessary to present Plan sections over the course of several monthly meetings if the document is long or complex. The draft will be forwarded to the State Planning Council after any revisions have been made to address Technical Committee comments.

Step Five: Adoption of the Plan

The State Planning Council reviews the final draft and takes action to accept it for a public hearing. The State Planning Council Secretary schedules and conducts the hearing(s) at which public comments on the draft are accepted. The State Planning Council reviews the draft along with a report of public comment. The report includes any written comments received during the review period, together with any changes recommended by the Statewide Planning staff. The Council may then adopt the final plan as presented, or with additional changes. Once the element or the update is adopted, it is an official part of the State Guide Plan. Plans and amendments are filed with the Secretary of State pursuant to Public Records Act ([RIGL 38-2](#)).

Step Six: Monitoring

One often-overlooked part of the Guide Plan process is performance monitoring. While there is no formal requirement to do so, the authorizing language for the Guide Plan notes that the planning process "shall be closely coordinated with the budgeting process". Annual review is recommended.

Step Seven: Update / Amendment

Some State Guide Plan elements are legally mandated to be updated every five years and some are updated on an as needed basis. These revisions can range from a total rewrite to an amendment with a specific purpose or a technical update.

Evaluating Plan Quality

In order for the elements of the State Guide Plan to be successful, they need to be practical, user-friendly, hands-on documents. They must be accessible to state and local planners, citizens, project managers, students, elected officials, and others who may need them. Here are some questions that one might ask to guide preparers in evaluating plan effectiveness and whether a draft document is really “a plan”.

Is there a Plan?

A plan should clearly identify how the State will get from today to tomorrow. Plans lay out goals and measurable objectives to reach those goals. Timeframes for achieving objectives should be made explicit whenever possible.

Is the plan clear?

A plan should be concise, well researched, written, and presented in an inviting format.

Is the plan placed in context?

Each element is part of the whole State Guide Plan. As such, it is important that writers are aware of the other plans that may overlap topically and that those other plans are referred to when appropriate. Plans should discuss the relevant history, current issues, and other planning and programmatic documents on the topic in sufficient detail to place the plan in context. Note that this does not mean that it is necessary to give a comprehensive history of the topic in the State, particularly if that has been done elsewhere.

Is the Plan accountable?

Plans are meant to be implemented. The planning process is intended to be tied to the budget process and other performance measures. A plan's objectives should be measurable and measured. Plans should specify parties responsible for implementing objectives, ideally within targeted timeframes.

Are the policies clear and accepted by the stakeholders?

Plans are based on goals and policies that direct the objectives and implementing recommendations within a plan. Each of the elements of the State Guide Plan impact stakeholders who may have varying views on what ought to be done and how. The process of drafting policies allows these perspectives to come to bear on policy options and results in consensus statements on how to proceed. If a plan does a good job at achieving and articulating consensus on policies surrounding important but previously contentious issues it has done well. Implementing objectives and strategies should be clearly tied to the plan's goals and policies.

Is the plan useful?

Given that a primary use for plans is to check other plans and projects for consistency with that plan, a user should be able to identify goals, policies, and objectives when reading or using a plan. These items should be written, formatted and, ideally indexed, in such a way that the Guide Plan element can be easily used to evaluate other plans and projects for consistency.