

**Report on the Joint Meeting of
the Tulare County Youth Commission and
the Tulare County Step Up Advisory Board
February 15, 2019**

*Prepared and submitted by
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Report Contents

- Meeting Summary
- Synthesis of SWOT Analysis
- SWOT Analysis chart
- Debrief with participants
- Recommendations

Meeting Summary

On February 15th, 2019, at 1:00 pm, Supervisor Eddie Valero convened a joint session of the Tulare County Youth Commission and the Tulare County Step Up Advisory Board. Representing the Youth Commission were Eldonna Caudill (District 1), Angela Ruiz-Alvarez (District 4), Yonok Warson (District 4), and Victoria Riddle (Member-At-Large). Representing the Advisory Board were Frank Escobar (Visalia Unified School District), Rob Herman (Tulare County Office of Education), Mary Alice Escarcega-Fechner (CSET). Also participating were Supervisor Valero, Samantha Ferrero (Board of Supervisors staff), Allison Pierce (HHS, formerly Step Up staff), and Juan Guerrero (Visalia Unified School District Board, slated to join the Youth Commission). Dr. Logan Robertson, who has been involved in Step Up since 2008, facilitated the meeting.

After introductions, a public comment period (during which no comments were offered), and an opening activity, the group began to analyze the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats for the Step Up initiative. The SWOT Analysis technique was developed in the 1960s and 70s, using data from a variety of top companies to better understand why corporate planning failed. SWOT Analysis has come to be used by organizations in a variety of fields to guide strategic planning and decision-making.

The participants were organized into three working groups:

- Group 1 – Supervisor Valero, Angela Ruiz-Alvarez, Mary Alice Escarcega-Fechner, and Juan Guerrero.
- Group 2 – Rob Herman, Samantha Ferrero, Yonok Warson, and Victoria Riddle.
- Group 3 – Frank Escobar, Allison Pierce, Eldonna Caudill.

The format for analyzing each domain (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) was as follows:

- 8-10 minutes of small group discussion and generation of ideas related to the domain, written on sticky notes and posted on a chart at the front of the room.
- 3-5 minute presentations by each group.
- 3-5 minutes of small group discussion to prioritize/rank the top 2-3 ideas.

- 8-10 minutes of whole group discussion, during which Dr. Robertson scribed each group's prioritized list and participants made further comments related to the domain under discussion

The participants proceeded through the Step Up SWOT Analysis in this manner from approximately 1:30 to 2:55. After a brief period of general comments from the group, Dr. Robertson invited Supervisor Valero to present his closing thoughts and share his ideas for next steps. Supervisor Valero thanked the participants and distributed several documents to the group: a proposed flow chart for Step Up, an outline of a proposal for a Fatherless Youth Ad Hoc committee, notes from a 2/11/19 "Tulare County Collaboration Meeting" (Supervisor Valero and representatives of Kaweah Delta, UC Merced, and UCSF-Fresno), and an outline of meetings dates, topics, and guest speakers for a proposed Youth Leadership Academy. After brief discussion and questions from the participants, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:10 pm.

Summary of SWOT Analysis

This analysis is followed by a chart that displays the top ranked items in each domain for the three working groups. Please note that the colors used in the chart are an attempt to show commonalities across working groups within each domain, and **do not represent linkages between domains.**

Internal strengths to build upon – The Step Up strength most consistently identified as high priority by the groups was related to **collaboration**. Since its beginning in 2007, Step Up has brought a variety of partners to the table, both as individuals and representatives of organizations. Because Step Up was driven by the **passion and expertise of stakeholders**, these partners were willing to invest extra time and energy in this work. This allowed Step Up to **leverage** its minimal staffing (1 FTE 2015-16, and portion of Board staff time from 2007-2014 and 2017-present) to create programs whose impact was felt in **all the Supervisorial districts** of Tulare County. **Consistent funding** and **commitment from the Supervisors** has also allowed Step Up to "**seed**" new programs **throughout the county**, particularly in the smaller rural communities where minimal services for **families and youth** are available.

Internal weaknesses to invest in – Two weaknesses rose to the highest level of concern: **consistent leadership** (especially in times of transition), and **reporting of data** on Step Up programs. Each Supervisor who has chaired the Step Up committees has brought different assets and interests, and **transitions of leadership** have the potential to negatively impact Step Up's work if not carefully and thoughtfully managed. Because of Step Up's limited **staff time and resources**, it is possible that **collection and reporting of outcome data** might not

be as thorough or as consistent as needed for the most effective **messaging** to stakeholders and the public. One further weakness identified was the defining of **population served**, which has shifted from an initial focus on gang-involved youth to a broader inclusion of all youth/families who have limited engagement with positive activities. Guidance for investing in these weaknesses might be found in the *Step Up Strategic Plan*, adopted by the Advisory Committee in 2015.

External **opportunities** to shore up – The participants consistently identified **branding** (marketing, messaging) as the greatest potential opportunity for the Step Up initiative. Step Up's logo and name are recognized throughout the county, and many smaller communities have developed their own clubs, programs, or youth centers under the Step Up name. As a countywide brand with programs in all 5 supervisorial districts, Step Up has the potential to positively impact residents' perceptions of the county government and Board of Supervisors, as well as the image of Tulare County in other parts of California. All three groups also identified **opportunities to expand** the Step Up initiative (linking/leveraging resources and relationships), and one group also honed in on the potential for Step Up to **fill gaps**, especially in smaller and more remote Tulare County communities, where Step Up sponsored programs may be the only youth activities offered.

External **threats** to monitor – Two primary threats were identified by the groups: **funding instability** and **lack of data**. These items were also listed as internal weaknesses, but to the extent that funding and data availability are subject to forces outside the Step Up initiative, the participants felt it was important to list them under this category as well. One group further identified **change in leadership** as a threat, given that leadership is impacted by changes in the Board of Supervisors and in partner organizations.

Please refer to the chart on the following page for more information about the content of the SWOT Analysis.

SWOT Analysis Chart

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths <i>(build)</i></p> <p><u>Group 1</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaboration 2. Driven by stakeholders 3. Serves entire county 4. Serves entire family <p><u>Group 2</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consistent funding 2. Communication/collaboration between agencies <p><u>Group 3</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaboration 2. Expertise/passion 3. Consistent and leveraged funding <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seed funding • Commitment from Supervisors 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses <i>(invest)</i></p> <p><u>Group 1</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transition of leadership 2. Data on programs 3. Messaging 4. Defining population served <p><u>Group 2</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Change of leadership 2. Data on programs 3. Messaging <p><u>Group 3</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reporting 2. Sharing info about impact 3. Leadership 4. Time <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time and resources 	INTERNAL
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities <i>(shore up)</i></p> <p><u>Group 1</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Branding/marketing 2. Fill gaps 3. Linking resources/capacity building <p><u>Group 2</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Marketing/messaging 2. Identify opportunities to expand <p><u>Group 3</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Branding 2. Leveraging resources 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats <i>(monitor)</i></p> <p><u>Group 1</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of data 2. Unstable funding 3. Change in leadership <p><u>Group 2</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unstable funding 2. Data collection <p><u>Group 3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See groups 1 and 2 	EXTERNAL
HELPFUL	HARMFUL	

Debrief with participants

In the week following the meeting, Dr. Robertson was able to debrief individually with some of the individuals present at the meeting, who also recounted their post-meeting conversations with other participants. This section summarizes direct and indirect feedback from a total of 7 of the 9 meeting participants representing the Youth Commission, Advisory Committee, or the public.

Participants consistently articulated that the collaborative process of the SWOT analysis had validated their investment of time and energy in the Step Up initiative. They felt that the analysis was both timely and appropriate, given the recent change of leadership from Supervisor Shuklian to Supervisor Valero. Participants were also positive about Supervisor Valero's passion for and experience with youth programming. Additionally, since four years have passed since the adoption of the current Step Up Strategic Plan, the participants thought that 2019 is an apt time to review and analyze the initiative's overall direction, organizational structure, and specific programming.

However, the participants communicated deep concern over the disconnect between the strategic process of the SWOT analysis and the proposals presented at the end of the meeting. Some questioned the value of the time spent on the SWOT analysis when so many changes to Step Up were already proceeding. Although the documents were presented as a work-in-progress with a stated openness to feedback, the participants voiced many questions, including:

- What is the process and timing for evaluating the effectiveness of current Step Up programs and deciding which ones will be continued?
- What is the process and timing for evaluating and approving the proposed new Step Up programs?
- Which proposed programs make sense under the Board of Supervisors and the Step Up initiative? Which programs are better managed by non-profits or county departments?
- What is the process and timing for approving the termination of the Youth Commission? What is the Board of Supervisors' role?
- What is the process and timing for approving the restructuring of the Step Up Advisory Committee? What is the Board of Supervisors' role?
- Given the proposed elimination of the Youth Activities grants, which is the only Step Up funding distributed equally among the supervisorial districts, how will the gaps created in small, rural communities be filled?
- What is the current total Step Up budget and the amount allocated to each program?

- What is the process by which the Step Up budget will be re-allocated among the programs in the newly proposed structure? (Who approves budget allocations?)
- How will Step Up funding be able to support all of the proposed programs?
- How will the very limited Step Up staff be able to support all of the proposed programs?

Participants expressed openness to change and acknowledged the potential value of many of the proposed changes. However, participants felt that the manner in which the proposals were presented served to emphasize the seriousness of the weaknesses and threats identified through the SWOT analysis process, as well as potentially undermining Step Up's greatest strength – its collaborative and stakeholder-driven nature.

Recommendations

Based on the Step Up SWOT analysis and meeting debrief, the following actions are suggested:

- Reconsider the timeline for restructuring of the Step Up initiative in order to provide the opportunity to actively involve current Step Up stakeholders in the process.
- Engage in a intentional and collaborative process of
 - reviewing and revising the Step Up Strategic Plan,
 - evaluating the current Step Up organizational structure and the effectiveness of individual current programs, and
 - developing a revised set of organizational structures, processes, and programs.
- Create a safe environment where Step Up stakeholders know that their concerns, ideas, and efforts are valued.
- Practice transparency in communication and decision-making, so that stakeholders will feel confident in the time and energy they invest in Step Up's collaborative efforts.

Report prepared and submitted by Logan Robertson, Ph.D., February 26, 2019.