



**Substance use and Addiction Translational
Research Network (SATRN) Strategic Plan**
February 2021, updated August 2021



LeCroy & Milligan
ASSOCIATES, INC.

Substance use and Addiction Translational Research Network (SATRN) Strategic Plan

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About LeCroy & Milligan Associates, Inc.:

Founded in 1991, LeCroy & Milligan Associates (LMA), Inc. is a consulting firm specializing in social services and education program evaluation and training that is comprehensive, research-driven, and useful. Our goal is to provide effective program evaluation and training that enables stakeholders to document outcomes, provide accountability, and engage in continuous program improvement. With central offices located in Tucson, Arizona, LMA has worked at the local, state, and national levels with a broad spectrum of social services, criminal justice, education, and behavioral health programs.

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Introduction

The Substance use and Addiction Translational Research Network (SATRN) is an initiative formed in 2020 out of Arizona State University (ASU). The initiative brings together community practitioners and academic researchers across Arizona and facilitates collaboration on research surrounding substance use. ASU contracted with LeCroy & Milligan Associates (LMA) to guide a strategic planning process that would result in a three-year plan to guide SATRN’s priorities and efforts. As part of this process, LMA assisted with facilitating SATRN’s two-day launch event in November 2020, which brought 83 academic researchers and community practitioners together to learn from each other and engage in discussion on the next stages of SATRN’s development.

Following the launch, attendees were invited to complete a survey including questions about the workshop and their interest in future involvement with SATRN. LMA summarized survey results in a report that was provided to the SATRN Steering Committee before the strategic planning process. The survey results provided input from multiple stakeholder perspectives on future steps in the development of SATRN, ranging from stakeholders’ preferred communication methods to perceived benefits from participation in SATRN. These perspectives, along with notes taken at the launch event, were considered in the development of strategies included in the plan. Appendix A includes the full survey report.

More structured strategic planning began in February 2021, when LMA facilitated two virtual strategic planning sessions with six SATRN Steering Committee members from ASU and five community partners representing diverse nonprofit and government organizations including the Arizona Judicial Branch, Probation Services; La Frontera; MATFORCE; Native American Connections; and Sonoran Prevention Works. The first session focused on the foundational components of the plan, while the second session centered on goal and strategy development. Appendix B includes collaborative documents from the planning sessions capturing ideas and information shared by stakeholders during guided activities.

Exhibit 1. The SATRN Strategic Planning Process



Information shared during strategic planning sessions informed the development of the preliminary plan. This current version of the plan reflects subsequent input from the SATRN Steering Committee aimed at refining the mission, vision, values statements, and strategic goals, as well as continuing to develop implementation priorities for the next 2-3 years. Because SATRN is in the beginning stages of its development, it is recommended that this plan is reviewed and updated regularly as the initiative matures. While goals and strategies may be further developed, the foundational components of the plan, including SATRN’s core values, mission, and vision, are intended to guide future action planning.

Mission, Vision, & Values

SATRN’s mission, vision, and core values serve as the foundation of the strategic plan. While the mission describes SATRN’s purpose, the vision is what SATRN aspires to achieve in the distant future. The core values represent SATRN’s highest priorities and describe how the network will operate in pursuit of its vision. Identifying these three foundational components is a critical stage in building consensus among key stakeholders and establishing the foundation on which SATRN’s goals, strategies, and actions are built.

Exhibit 2. Strategic Plan Foundation

MISSION

To foster collaborations among community and university partners to conduct translational research that has meaningful, measurable impact on individual and societal problems related to substance use and addiction in Arizona.

VISION

An Arizona increasingly free from individual & community distress, disease, and death associated with substance use and addiction.

VALUES

- Community Empowerment:** Community entities are equal partners in research that is grounded in community needs, issues, and concerns.
- Reciprocity:** Two-way knowledge transfer and co-learning are needed for effective, equitable, enduring solutions.
- Inclusiveness:** SATRN aims to reflect and engage the diverse communities it serves in a safe, respectful environment.
- Transdisciplinary Perspective:** Appreciation and integration of different disciplines, from basic biology to population health, are needed to solve complex problems.
- Solutions Orientation:** Translational research points toward practical solutions to real world needs.
- Equity:** Solutions are needed that prioritize systems change to address disparities in substance use/addiction services and outcomes, benefitting the health & well-being of *all* people and society.



Goals & Strategies

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats (SWOT)

Identifying SATRN’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats was a key component of the strategic planning process. A SWOT analysis was used to assist with identifying strategic goals and strategies.

When conducting a SWOT analysis, strengths and weaknesses are factors internal to the organization, while opportunities and threats are external factors. The external factors are particularly important to consider when developing strategies to maximize positive influences and minimize negative influences affecting SATRN’s work.

Exhibit 3. Results of SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center;">STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad, diverse expertise and points of view • Strong interest in collaboration • Motivated & prepared to identify where problems exist • Institutional support • Involvement of ASU researchers & alignment with ASU mission • Access to a myriad of scientific resources • Strong community & university partnerships • Access to a large population-base and various resources 	<p style="text-align: center;">WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited time and financial resources • The pacing of funding mechanisms not designed for community research • Evidence-based programs not designed within the community context • Lacking in some areas of expertise • Misalignment between structural incentives and community & researcher needs • Researchers not rewarded for this type of work • Weak infrastructure for community/research collaboration • Unpredictable population served
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build bridges across disciplines and between community & university partners • Understand different perspectives • Identify needs & develop collaborative research to address those needs • Link knowledge in a practical way to community • Develop relevant questions to guide research toward practical solutions • Future funding opportunities (e.g., Clinical Trials Network) • Funders requiring evidence-based approaches • Unfulfilled need in AZ 	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional academic silos • Fragmented systems that are difficult to navigate • Problem is broad, highly complex • Degree of state support for this area • Political agendas • Diverse points of view • Different languages, training backgrounds, organizational needs • Community partners not rewarded for this work • Lack of community buy-in • Competing personal agendas/priorities



SATRN is presented with an opportunity for community and university partners to conduct research that directly benefits individuals and communities. Although SATRN’s focus on substance use and its effect on the well-being of individuals and communities is somewhat broad, by working together to identify specific community needs and conduct relevant research, community and university partners can develop targeted, practical solutions. This will require overcoming traditional silos, fragmented systems, and individual differences and taking advantage of current financial support to build bridges across disciplines and between community and university partners. Given the reality of competing priorities and lack of recognition for this type of work, both for community and university partners, it is essential to promote the value of translational research in addressing individual and societal problems associated with substance use.

Strategic Goals

Results of the SWOT informed the identification of goals for the next three years. The strategic planning participants brainstormed 32 goals, all relating to the seven key areas highlighted in Exhibit 4. These are reflective of the broad topics included within the mission, vision, and values of SATRN.

Exhibit 4. SATRN Strategic Goal Areas



Strategies and Implementation Priorities

After brainstorming goals and identifying key strategic goal areas, the strategic planning participants then suggested strategies for each goal area. Those suggestions are reflected in the proposed strategies and implementation priorities below. Strategies and implementation priorities are provided for each subgoal falling under the seven overarching goal areas above. While some goal areas only have one goal, others have multiple subgoals. Initially proposed implementation priorities were offered as viable next steps; these have been further discussed and finalized by the SATRN Steering Committee.

Note: Implementation priorities in underlined type were complete or in progress in May 2021.



Strategic Goal 1: Network Building

<p>Goal 1–A: Increase the number of community & university stakeholders identifying as network members and participating in network activities.</p>
<p>The Strategy: As a new initiative, SATRN is in the beginning stages of network building. Conduct active outreach to expand membership, ensuring diverse representation across identities and experiences, areas of expertise, and Arizona communities, with broad representation among community stakeholders.</p>
<p>Proposed Implementation Priorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Define what network “membership” looks like, and delineate benefits that accrue from identifying as a SATRN member. Work with currently engaged community stakeholders to help articulate the benefits of their involvement, and include these benefits in targeted recruitment communications.2) <u>Follow up with SATRN launch attendees to sustain their interest in SATRN. Encourage participants to help grow the network by sending invitations to those in their professional networks.</u>3) Invite community stakeholders to serve as members of the steering committee. Invite their input on strategies to expand representation among community stakeholders and engage in outreach.4) <u>Contact seed grant recipients and applicants who are not yet SATRN members, inviting them to join the network and participate in activities.</u>5) Engage in ongoing recruitment of ASU researchers to expand areas of expertise, particularly focusing on researchers whose background and interests align with the research priorities identified by community stakeholders and are in disciplines not sufficiently represented.6) Identify administrative staffing needs for SATRN and hire appropriate support.7) Continue to define SATRN’s unique niche, focusing particularly on how it differs from and/or complements other organizations/groups already engaged in substance use work in Arizona.8) Consider conducting or commissioning a comprehensive review of organizations currently engaged in substance use prevention and treatment in the state, helping to define and market SATRN’s niche and identify potential network members.9) Develop and implement SATRN as a ‘node’ that fosters collaborative prevention and treatment research, including in collaboration with the NIDA Clinical Trial Network.10) Highlight success stories from SATRN collaborations in various communications, demonstrating mutual benefits of collaborative research for community and university partners. This may serve as an implicit and ongoing recruitment strategy.





Strategic Goal 2: Promote Collaborative Research

Goal 2–A: Using input from launch event, identify common interest themes, and form teams of community & university stakeholders to design and conduct high-impact research addressing community needs.

The Strategy: Once community stakeholders and researchers have identified overlapping areas of interest, teams (or sub-groups) within SATRN can be formed based on interest areas. This provides an opportunity for more regular communication and a structured format for developing collaborations.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Identify 3-5 interest areas based upon launch event discussions, and use the questions in the event follow-up survey to assess interest in joining one or more groups.
- 2) Identify one or more SATRN faculty members to lead each group, assisting with coordination and to share group needs and successes with the steering committee.
- 3) Provide a list of theme groups and leader contact information to all network members, inviting them to self-select group(s) to join.
- 4) Invite groups to share brief updates at regularly scheduled SATRN meetings.
- 5) Identify and share funding opportunities with groups that align with respective interest areas.

Goal 2–B: Promote and distribute funding for pilot projects through a seed grant program.

The Strategy: Providing seed grant funding for pilot projects may kickstart collaborative research and result in successes that can then be leveraged to garner further financial support for those projects.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Invite researcher and community input on parameters for a new seed grant program (e.g., timeline, funding amounts, investigator requirements, allowable uses of funds).
- 2) Prepare a seed grant request for proposals (RFP), and distribute to SATRN mailing list and beyond. Ensure application process is clearly explained and simple to complete so that it is accessible and does not require significant time from stakeholders.
- 3) Review proposals and select some for funding. Ensure representation of community stakeholders as well as steering committee members when reviewing/selecting proposals.
- 4) Provide feedback on proposals declined for funding. Offer mentorship by one or more steering committee or other SATRN members for promising but below-threshold proposals, either making funding conditional on minor revisions or encouraging resubmission in a future round.
- 5) Continue periodically re-issuing the RFP (e.g., every 6-12 months) as long as funding allows.
- 6) Disseminate and publicize seed grant program successes to garner more support from university leadership, retain the involvement of current SATRN stakeholders, and increase the network.
- 7) Encourage and provide support for teams to share collaborative research at university, community, state, and national events.



Goal 2–C: Develop ongoing mechanisms to identify research needs from the community stakeholder perspective.

The Strategy: Create a running, regularly updated list that describes community research needs, and encourage members to submit ideas to this list.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Host regular focus group(s) or meetings for community stakeholders to discuss research needs and identify areas of overlap. Provide opportunities at regularly scheduled SATRN meetings for community stakeholders to revisit and update the list.
- 2) Provide a mechanism on the SATRN website where community stakeholders can submit research needs and requests for researcher partners.
- 3) Review and identify a model or framework used to facilitate community-engaged, collaborative research that reflects how stakeholders will work together to lead research efforts. Revisit framework regularly to provide guidance on how to collaborate within this particular context.

Goal 2–D: Identify central research needs impeding efforts to prevent and treat substance use disorders and related problems. Form and support diverse teams to develop and conduct the needed programs of research.

The Strategy: Existing funding mechanisms reward piecemeal, investigator-initiated research by individual labs, rather than teamwork to address big problems. Jumpstart high-impact research by using problem analysis to identify crucial research gaps, and assemble teams with the necessary expertise to develop research addressing central, complex problems in the substance use domain.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Convene one or more planning meetings of SATRN members to identify central problems/gaps in knowledge that currently impede significant prevention, treatment, and policy advances.
- 2) Develop summary documents on each problem, analyzing what is known and what questions are most urgent, identifying domains of expertise needed to investigate and solve the problem, and estimating resources needed for the research.
- 3) Form teams and secure funding for large-scale programs of research.
- 4) Implement prevention and treatment research in collaboration with community and other partners.





Strategic Goal 3: Facilitate Communication

Goal 3–A: Hold regular meetings for community & university stakeholders engaged in SATRN.

The Strategy: To facilitate collaboration and build relationships within the network, opportunities are needed for stakeholders to engage regularly through virtual and/or in-person meetings. Because SATRN is intended to be an inclusive, statewide network, virtual meetings seem preferable to in-person meetings. Further, the post-launch survey results indicated that recurring virtual meetings were respondents’ preferred method for ongoing communication with SATRN. Respondents were split between those indicating they would attend biannual events and those who would attend quarterly events.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Host weekly or bimonthly brownbag meetings with presentations by SATRN members. Begin inviting all SATRN members (community as well as academic) to attend and consider presenting.
- 2) Host biannual meetings with SATRN stakeholders. Once the network grows and becomes more active, consider changing the meeting frequency to quarterly.
- 3) Solicit meeting agenda items from community stakeholders.
- 4) Provide opportunities for small group discussion at meetings to facilitate relationship building. It may be beneficial to allow people to self-select breakout rooms.
- 5) Prioritize communication among attendees over presentation of information, and be mindful of the length of meetings given stakeholders’ full schedules.

Goal 3–B: Develop multiple platform/mechanism(s) for advertising SATRN and its work, maintaining contact/visibility and sharing ideas and resources with stakeholders.

The Strategy: A website is critical to building the network and sharing information about SATRN with potential funders. In addition to a website, regular communication is recommended through social media, a listserv, and/or a newsletter.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Develop SATRN mailing list and/or listserv. Use to inform members of opportunities beyond SATRN (e.g., talks/webinars of interest; funding opportunities) as well as SATRN activities.
- 2) Develop and launch SATRN website with mission, vision, and values statements; “about” section; section on the Glen J. Swette Seed Grant Program and funded projects; training opportunities (see Goal 5-A); resources for community partners (see Goal 6-A); etc.
- 3) Promote the launch of the website, sending communications to partners that provide the link and detail what information is available, appealing to interests of all stakeholders.
- 4) Send regular newsletters to partners highlighting successes, opportunities for involvement, and upcoming events. In each communication, solicit information from partners to share in future network communications. It may be beneficial to survey stakeholders regarding their preferred form of communication (e.g., listserv, electronic newsletter, specific social media platforms, etc.).
- 5) Consider creating a SATRN social media account to share information with partners more regularly. Receive input from partners on their preferred platform. Identify an individual (or individuals) to manage the social media account. This may be an opportunity to engage ASU graduate students in SATRN.



§ Strategic Goal 4: Long-Term Funding

Goal 4–A: Pursue private and public funding opportunities to support SATRN in the long-term.

The Strategy: Build future capacity by securing financial support for individual time dedicated to SATRN (e.g., growing the network, leading communication efforts, coordinating meetings, etc., all of which are essential to developing a well-functioning and productive network), the seed grant program and other mission-appropriate research investments, and other SATRN initiatives.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Begin discussions about plans for future growth and associated needs for financial and structural support, beyond the initial 3-year period and set of initiatives.
- 2) Seek advice from ASU leadership/administration regarding structure within ASU (e.g., as a center or institute), and ways ASU can support SATRN's growth and mission.
- 3) At the Steering Committee level, work with ASU Knowledge Enterprise, the ASU Foundation, and other units to identify appropriate opportunities to pursue at the network level, and apply for such funding.
- 4) Dedicate a page of the website to information for potential donors.

Goal 4–B: Support network members in identifying and applying for research funding mechanisms appropriate for individual teams.

The Strategy: Beyond funding for the network itself, SATRN can help network members to identify and submit competitive applications for external research funding opportunities.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Delegate an individual or small group of individuals to regularly monitor funding opportunities available for research related to substance use disorders and direct this information to SATRN administrative support.
- 2) Share external opportunities for researcher-level funding with SATRN members via the website, a listserv, monthly newsletter and/or social media.
- 3) Provide network members with guidance on identifying appropriate funding opportunities and developing competitive proposals.
- 4) Create a structure within SATRN for providing members (especially junior faculty/new investigators) with mentorship in preparing external grant proposals.





Strategic Goal 5: Training

Goal 5–A: Provide training opportunities to enhance community stakeholders’ and university researchers’ understanding of each other’s perspectives and expertise.

The Strategy: To facilitate collaboration and reciprocity among stakeholders, an understanding of each other’s perspectives, motivations, and expertise is needed. This may begin by providing training or education on topics such as research methods, community agency perspective, successful approaches for community-based collaborative research, and discipline-specific approaches to substance use-related research, highlighting benefits from both the community and the university stakeholder perspective.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Hold regular, informal networking and learning “brownbag” lunches for network members, with talks and discussions aimed at expanding stakeholders’ understanding of each other’s perspectives, experiences, and areas of expertise. Due to the expansiveness of the network, these events will likely need to have a hybrid virtual/in-person format. (see also Goal 3-A, priority 1)
- 2) Develop a brief training on the purpose, benefits, and challenges of translational research, representing both community and university partner perspectives. Include examples of successful translational research projects in Arizona. Record training, and post on SATRN’s website.
- 3) Solicit ideas during regularly scheduled SATRN meetings for education/training needs among network partners.
- 4) Develop a series of video-based trainings and other resources addressing training needs. Consult with Ed Plus for support. Make trainings available on SATRN website and/or through ASU Online.
- 5) Include a training section on the SATRN website with information on research best practices and successes.

Goal 5–B: Engage with funding agencies, ASU leadership, Arizona policymakers, and others regarding the importance of & challenges with conducting clinical and community-driven translational research.

The Strategy: Educational events tailored to the interests and priorities of funders, ASU leadership, and other policy makers may help to advertise SATRN’s innovative approach and garner additional support for the network, as well as serving as a model for such efforts elsewhere. It may be particularly beneficial to provide examples from collaborative research projects resulting from SATRN to illustrate the value of community-driven research.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Take advantage of opportunities for SATRN members to give presentations on SATRN’s approach and success, e.g., to funding agencies and policymakers.
- 2) Host virtual and/or in-person events at ASU to share SATRN’s work with university leadership.
- 3) Invite university leadership and potential funders to attend biannual meetings and other events, as appropriate, to learn more about SATRN’s work and interact with community and university stakeholders engaged in collaborative research.
- 4) Invite university leadership and potential funders to join SATRN’s listserv and/or newsletter distribution list.
- 5) Consider producing a brief, publicly available annual report on successes and next steps.





Strategic Goal 6: Translation to Communities

Goal 6–A: Identify strategies and processes for making high-quality research findings, products, and tools available to the community in a useful way.

The Strategy: Support both community-based research and evidence-based practice by vetting high-quality research tools, findings, and products, and making them easily accessible. Gather community partners’ input on how research can be most beneficial, and how it might best be shared or utilized.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Include a “community resources” section in the SATRN website where stakeholders can access evidence-based resources (e.g., interventions, measures) vetted by university researchers.
- 2) Involve community stakeholders in generating research questions that will result in clear application in their communities.
- 3) Ensure research results (especially those funded by SATRN seed grants) are interpreted in collaboration with community partners. Engage all partners in developing a dissemination and implementation plan that includes a direct-to-community component.
- 4) Make use of social media and other virtual communication platforms to disseminate research.
- 5) Present research findings at community forums and events as appropriate.



Strategic Goal 7: Monitor Success

Goal 7–A: Identify concrete measures to track process-level successes and community improvements resulting from SATRN’s work.

The Strategy: Work collaboratively across community and university stakeholders to determine what measures or indicators are most important to track community improvements resulting from SATRN’s work. Develop a logic model that specifies SATRN’s key activities, proximal results of those activities, and distal outcomes to assess. When identifying measures, it is important to prioritize feasibility and the appropriateness of standardized measures across communities/efforts. In addition to allowing SATRN to track progress, identifying specific measures aligned with the key research areas of interest and continuously analyzing data may provide the information needed to understand complex issues associated with substance use.

Proposed Implementation Priorities:

- 1) Develop a logic model to help guide and determine key process measures (e.g., number of collaborative research grants awarded, number of network meetings held) and outcome measures (e.g., hospitalization rates, overdose rates, usage rates, substance use-related mortality).
- 2) Develop an inventory of data sources relevant to substance use in Arizona, identifying where gaps exist, for tracking longer-term outcomes of interest.
- 3) Prepare a list of potential measures or indicators to share with the broader network, and solicit their feedback.
- 4) Once key measures are identified, form a sub-committee to develop and coordinate a process for collecting and analyzing data relating to measures, including what types of primary data collection may be required and how it can occur.
- 5) Report annually to the network, funders, and other stakeholders on select measures.



Next Steps

The information above provides the overarching foundation of SATRN and lays out the mission, vision, values, and preliminary goals for the organization. This plan, and the proposed strategies, should be used to create a more detailed action/operational plan that specifies how the goals and strategies outlined above will be carried out. Further refinement of these strategies is encouraged. Since SATRN is in the early stages of development, it may be particularly beneficial to develop an action plan that focuses on the next year. As the network continues to grow and garner support, it may become easier to identify specific objectives, responsible parties, and timelines to achieve objectives related to strategic goals and strategies. It is also important to periodically revisit the foundational elements of this strategic plan to see if they can be further refined as the network evolves over the next few years.

An additional next step may be planning for a second SATRN virtual event that serves as a follow-up to the November 2020 launch. Of those responding to the post-launch event survey, 92% indicated they were interested or very interested in participating in future SATRN events. Such an event is an opportunity to share strategic goals and strategies and engage community stakeholders in action planning. This may result in increased buy-in among community stakeholders and an understanding of the specific role(s) they can play in SATRN. Additionally, this provides an opportunity for university stakeholders to engage in future planning with community stakeholders as equal partners in all stages of research.

Another recommended next step is to consider inviting one or more community stakeholders to serve on the SATRN steering committee to demonstrate a commitment to collaboration, inclusion, and shared power and decision-making between university and community stakeholders. It may be beneficial to the network to have a few community stakeholders serving on the steering committee to help achieve diverse representation among SATRN's leadership. This can help ensure that both community and university perspectives are heard and valued.

Finally, the steering committee may find it helpful to develop a logic model that provides an overview of the network's resources, activities, and desired outcomes. This process will allow key stakeholders to continue refining what SATRN wants to achieve and what is needed to get there. Logic modeling can also help build consensus and foster collaboration within the group. The end product is a graphical representation of SATRN's work that can be readily shared to quickly articulate what SATRN does and plans to achieve in the years ahead.

This strategic plan offers a foundation on which to build as SATRN grows, matures, and continues to facilitate important collaborations resulting in meaningful impact in communities throughout the Arizona. As strategic goals are met and new opportunities and challenges arise, it will be important to update this plan, ensuring new goals and strategies reflect SATRN's mission, vision, and values and help to support health and well-being for all Arizonans.

