

Update on 2015 OPTN/UNOS Strategic Plan: Allocation of Effort and Distribution of Manpower

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Abstract The process by which the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) allocates its effort is central to the pursuit of its mission. UNOS serves to support the field of solid organ and vascularized composite allograft transplantation and donation, and its many members, as well as to meet the requirements in its role as the contractor for the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN). As the responsibilities of UNOS have increased markedly over the past three decades, the role of strategic planning has become increasingly critical in providing direction to the organization. Over the course of the past 18 months, the organization has undertaken a re-assessment of its strategic goals and generated a modified set of goals to guide its function from 2015 to 2018. A key feature of this new strategic plan is the delineation of not only the goals to be pursued but also the relative effort to be deployed in support of each goal, as determined by the transplant community. The process by which these goals were developed and resources allocated in support of the goals is detailed.

Keywords Organ transplantation · Strategic planning · Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network · United Network for Organ Sharing

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Introduction

United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), the organization which serves as the contractor for the federally mandated Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN), is a unique organization composed of hundreds of paid professionals and served by nearly 500 volunteers. The volunteers come from remarkably diverse backgrounds but with a common interest in moving the field of solid organ and vascularized composite allograft transplantation and donation forward with a goal of meeting the needs of the transplant candidates and recipients, living donors, deceased organ donors and their families, transplant centers, organ procurement organizations, histocompatibility labs, and transplant community as a whole. It is through the interactions of the UNOS leadership and staff, and these volunteers, that the organization works to optimize the efficiency of the donation and transplantation network and manage the constant scientific advances that are the hallmark of the field.

The import associated with development of a strong strategic plan for the OPTN/UNOS has changed considerably over the last three decades since the first OPTN contract was awarded in 1986. In the early years, it was felt that the primary focus of energy of the organization should be directed at the service of the two federal contracts that supported the contractor: operating the OPTN and Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR). In the early years, the scope of work that was to be accomplished under these contracts was much smaller than at present, and there did not appear to be a need for a highly detailed strategic plan. In its infancy as an organization, early priorities were clear: run matches for allocation, assist with organ placement when needed, collect and analyze a modest amount of data, develop and refine early allocation policies, and develop fundamental membership and key personnel criteria, so that qualified transplant programs could

open and expand patient access to transplantation. At that time, registration fees were low, and difficult choices regarding allocation of effort of the organization were few, as the focus of the organization was narrow, the field was in its infancy, and there were no serious financial constraints that limited the work being pursued.

Historical Perspective on UNOS/OPTN Strategic Planning

Over the course of the ensuing decades, however, many changes have taken place that have impacted the focus of the organization, and UNOS grew to meet many other needs defined by its members, the transplant community, and the federal government. A focus on quality/continuous improvement and the development of profoundly more sophisticated information technology approaches to efficiently manage the transplantation system began to greatly impact the organization. At this critical juncture, it was no longer possible to fully embrace an unfettered ground-up approach to project development and management that had been traditionally feasible within the organization. As such, in the early 2000s, the OPTN's bottom-up process for identifying needed policy work began to outstrip the IT capacity needed to implement policies passed by the Board of Directors, particularly as simultaneous demands for IT operability arose in support of Unet and DonorNet.

It was then that the capacity of the organization to perform work to meet the demands of its federal contractual obligations and fulfill the desires of the transplant community to move transplantation forward began to overwhelm the

organization that was constrained by its federal budget and the availability of registration fees. In this environment, the need for strategic planning became increasingly apparent. The leadership of the OPTN engaged in a series of planning exercises resulting in the OPTN Vision Statement in 2008: "The OPTN promotes long, healthy and productive lives for persons with organ failure by promoting maximized organ supply, effective and safe care, and equitable organ allocation and access to transplantation; and doing so by balancing competing goals in ways that are transparent, inclusive, and enhance public trust in the national organ donation system."

As UNOS continued to develop its strategic plan, it made considerable progress in articulating specific goals. The penultimate strategic plan, approved in 2012, delineated six key goals: (1) increase the number of transplants, (2) increase access to transplants, (3) improve survival for patients with end-stage organ failure, (4) promote transplant patient safety, (5) promote living donor safety, and (6) promote the efficient management of the OPTN. Each goal had identified objectives, strategies, and key initiatives. This approach to planning defined a road map for the organization such that staff, volunteers, and members could better focus the organization's resources upon the identified goals. With the annual planning by committees for their work in the year ahead, the UNOS Policy Oversight Committee reviewed projects and policies with the strategic plan in mind and worked to keep the energy of the organization focused on the six goals.

In its various iterations, however, the implementation of the strategic plan was hampered by an absence of clearly defined expectations regarding the distribution of effort of the organization across the goals, leading to potential imbalance. Work at the Policy Oversight Committee, Executive Committee,

Fig. 1 Recommendations for allocations of effort with regard to the 2012 Strategic Goals resulting from the 11 UNOS Regional Strategic Planning meetings

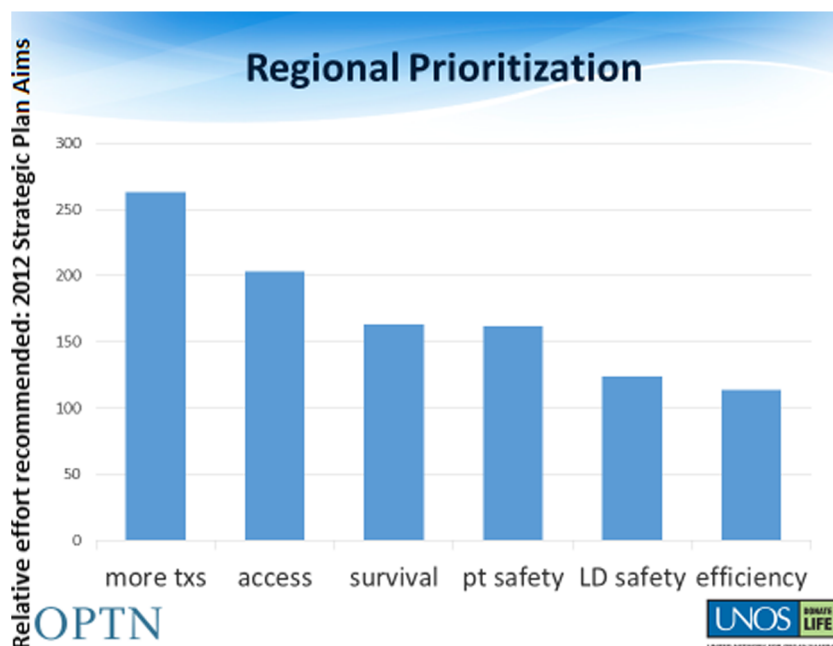
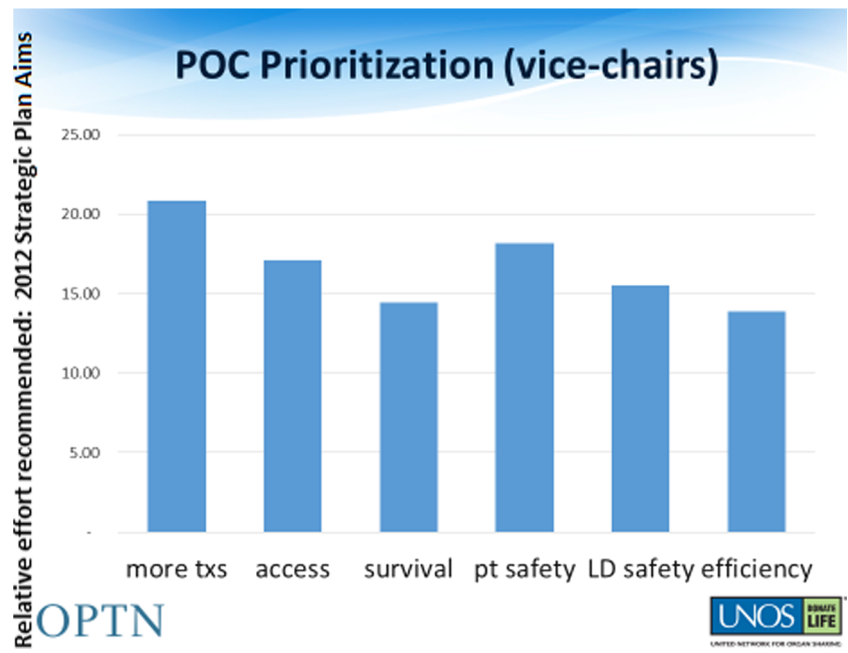


Fig. 2 Recommendations for allocations of effort with regard to the 2012 Strategic Goals recommended by the UNOS Policy Oversight Committee, of which all UNOS Committee Vice-Chairs are members



and Board of Directors levels resulted in some refinement of effort in support of the 2012 Strategic Plan, but during the 2012 to 2015 life span of this plan, no clearly defined allocation of effort was delineated.

Development of the 2015–2018 Strategic Plan

Over the course of the last 18 months, UNOS has undertaken considerable effort to further refine its strategic planning process, with the eventual generation of the

2015–2018 Strategic Plan. Building off the strengths and weaknesses of prior strategic planning efforts, the Board and UNOS staff leadership undertook a nationwide strategic planning process. The foundation of the 2015–2018 Strategic Planning process was built upon open sessions occurring at the fall 2014 Regional Meetings. All UNOS members were invited to attend and actively participate in the sessions. These meetings were run by the elected Regional Councilors, in conjunction with the UNOS BOD President, Immediate Past-President, and President-elect. Wide-ranging discussions ensued regarding the

Fig. 3 Recommendations for allocations of effort with regard to the 2012 Strategic Goals made by the UNOS Committee Chairs

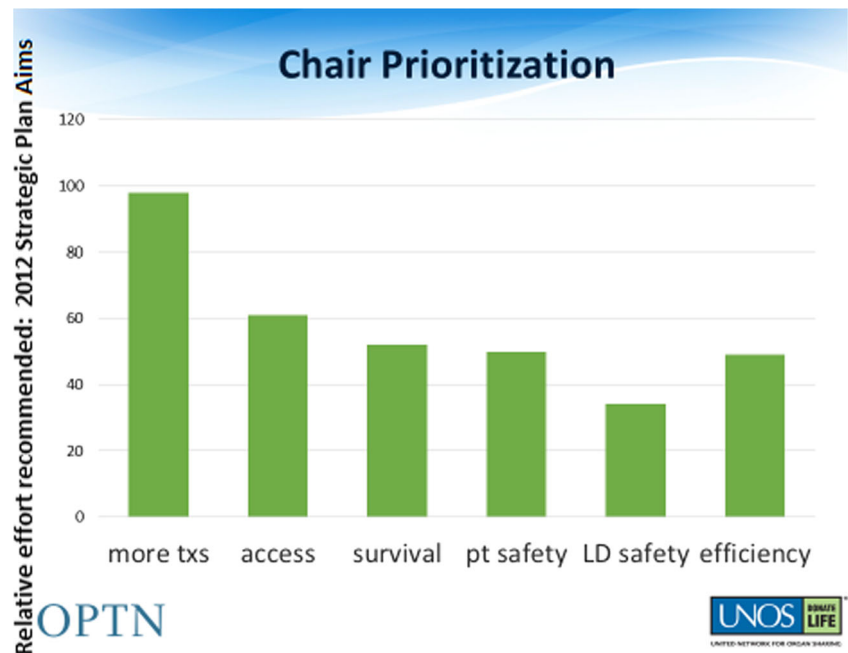
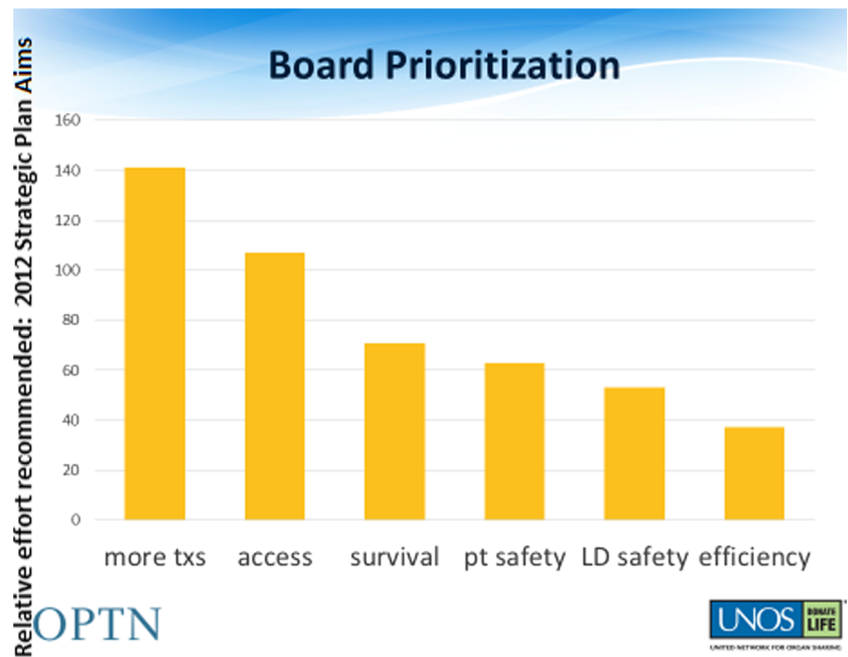


Fig. 4 Recommendations for allocations of effort with regard to the 2012 Strategic Goals made by the members of the UNOS Board of Directors



appropriateness of the 2012 goals, proposed revisions to the goals, and, most importantly, members’ desired allocation of resources among the goals. Members at these regional meetings provided an estimate of the optimum resources that should be provided in support of each of the goals (Fig. 1). Additional assessment of the desired resource allocation was obtained from the Committee Vice-Chairs all of whom who serve on the Policy Oversight Committee (Fig. 2), Committee Chairs (Fig. 3), and the members of the Board of Directors (Fig. 4).

Based upon the multi-factorial input described above, the UNOS Executive Committee considered the 2012 Strategic

Plan and developed a draft 2015 Strategic Plan. The Executive Committee recommended consolidation of two patient safety goals into one to include patients of every category: waitlist candidates, transplant recipients, and living donors. In addition, the Executive Committee recommended inserting the term “equity” to the 2012 Strategic Plan Goal 2. As such, the proposed 2015 plan provides five key goals: (1) increase the number of transplants; (2) provide equity in access to transplants; (3) improve waitlisted patient, living donor, and transplant recipient outcomes; (4) promote living donor and transplant recipient safety; and (5) promote efficient management of the OPTN. This plan was submitted to Public Comment and passed unanimously by the Board of

Fig. 5 Relative distribution of effort recommended by the UNOS Board of Directors for the 2015–2016 implementation of strategic plan

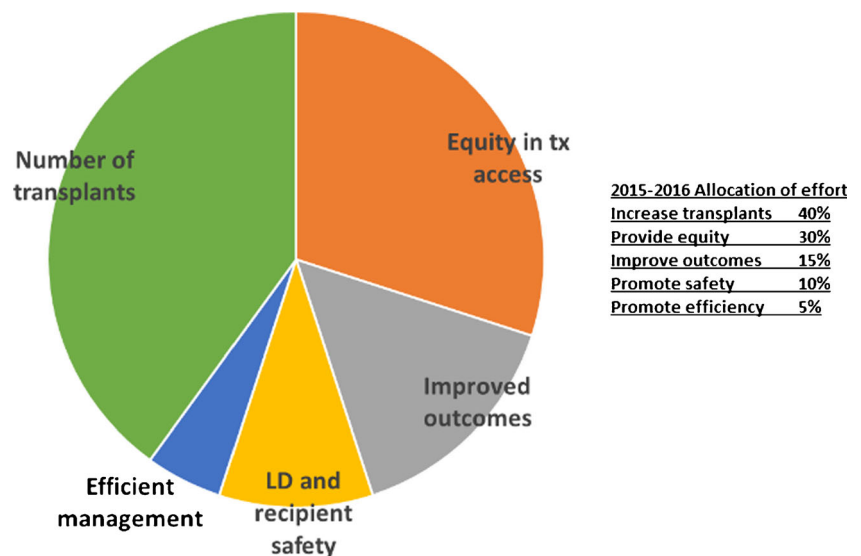
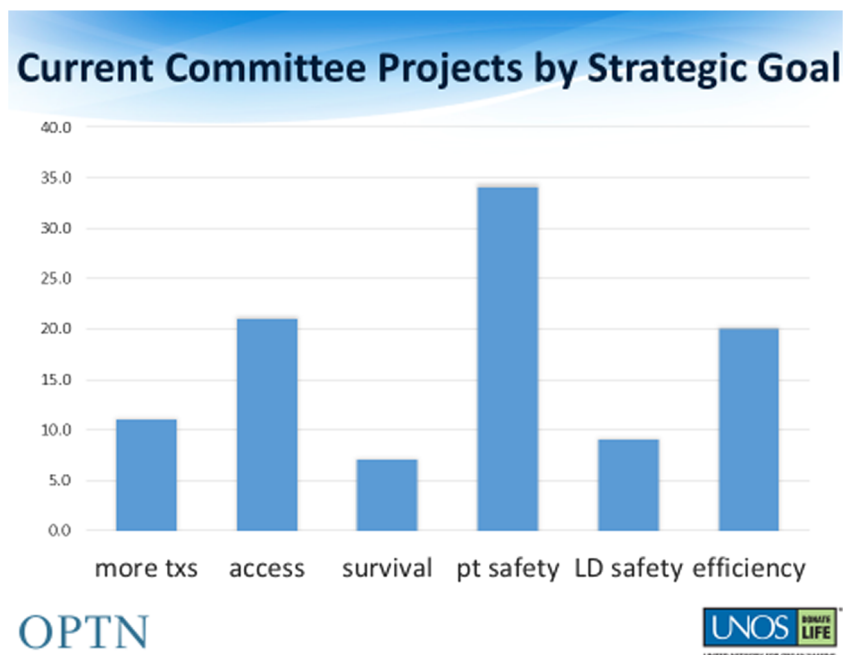


Fig. 6 Relative effort being expended by UNOS in support of 2012 Strategic Goals at the time of the 2015 Strategic Plan development



Directors in June 2015 [http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/SharedContentDocuments/OPTN_Committee_Initiatives_2013-2014.pdf, <http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/>].

Critical to the 2015 Strategic Plan, however, was not just the delineation of the key goals for the organization but also a specific recommendation for the resources to be deployed in support of each goal. In contrast to previous strategic planning efforts, which did not address resource allocation, the new strategic plan recommends the organization to allocate effort in the first year of the plan as outlined in Fig. 5. While the Executive Committee and Board of Directors did not expect an immediate realignment of effort on the date of passage of the new strategic plan, which would have interrupted many projects nearing completion, the Executive Committee did engage the Policy Oversight Committee and Committee Chairs to re-assess all projects not set for Board approval at the next Board meeting and to plan for a shift to the newly mandated resource allocation. This necessitated considerable effort and compromise, as the resource allocation needed for projects under planning varied considerably from the recommended allocation of effort for 2015–2016 (Fig. 6). Over the 6 months since the passage of the 2015 Strategic Plan, increasing alignment between UNOS work effort and the allocation of effort recommended in support of the plan has become apparent.

Conclusion

With the approval of the 2015–2018 Strategic Plan, UNOS prepares for the next 3 years of its existence. The planning

process has changed steadily as the organization has evolved to meet the needs of the transplant and donation community. As we implement the effort-focused support of the organization's goals, we will surely learn opportunities to enhance the strategic plan as well as further improve the strategic planning process that will formally occur again in 2017. In the interim, the Policy Oversight Committee, Executive Committee, and Board of Directors are tasked with supporting the goals, as well as considering future allocation of effort in the remaining 2 years of the plan. It would be expected that the plan and effort will continue to evolve in the years ahead as the transplant and donation community continues to tackle the constant changes in the field and the Board of Directors looks to meet the needs of its diverse membership and those we together serve. It is hoped that the strategic plan will generate new approaches to better serve transplant candidates awaiting transplantation and result in increased numbers of transplants, continue to focus on access to transplantation, and continue to focus on patient safety.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest Carl L. Berg served as President, UNOS/OPTN Board of Directors, during the development of the UNOS/OPTN Strategic Plan and is currently Immediate Past-President of the UNOS/OPTN Board of Directors.

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Human and Animal Rights and Informed Consent This article does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by any of the authors.