

# METHOD SMART CRITERIA/GOALS



**Area of CoP Activity:** Taking Action as a Community

**CoP Lifecycle Phase:** Design

**CoP Success Factor:** Strategy

**EIGE Step:** Step 1: Getting Started  
Step 3: Setting up a GEP

**Group Size:** 1-8

**Difficulty Level:** 

**Time Needed:** 

**Facilitator Preparation:** 

**Participant Preparation:** 

**Description:** If your community is always working hard to achieve a goal but not making progress then SMART goals can help to clarify ideas, focus efforts, use time and resources productively, and increase the chances of achieving an objective. The letters stand for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Terminable. It helps to determine the objectives of actions.

**More Information:** Lawlor and Hornyak 2012  
MacLeod 2013  
[www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm).

## SMART CRITERIA / GOALS<sup>1</sup>

### Short description

If your community is always working hard to achieve a goal but not making progress then SMART goals can help to clarify ideas, focus efforts, use time and resources productively, and increase the chances of achieving an objective. Studies have shown that people who have ambitious and tangible goals perform better than people who have imprecise and unambitious goals. The letters stand for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Terminable. It helps to determine the objectives of actions.

### When to use

SMART criteria support the clarification of goals and objectives. It is therefore a valuable tool for the planning and implementation of a project. Objectives are easier to reach if they are defined and clarified. If it is not clear to everyone what they want to achieve and where they want to be in the end, the process lacks productivity, structure and might not be successful. If this is the case SMART criteria can help defining and understanding the goals which leads to understanding and motivation of the team or oneself.

### How to

#### A: Brief explanation

The SMART acronyms stand for:

- **Specific:** Is the goal concrete and unambiguous? Is it clear what is to change with whom / where / what is to have changed after achieving the goal? Define what exactly the goal is.
- **Measurable:** Is it possible to check whether the goal has been achieved? Are there numbers who indicate the success of a project/task?
- **Attainable:** Is the goal achievable and feasible?
- **Realistic:** Is the goal achievable at all? Can it be done?
- **Timely:** Can the goal be achieved within a certain period?

#### B: Detailed step-by-step guide:

First, there has to be a goal. Let us use the example of "I want to publish a paper".

Then you need to check the criteria above. What is important is that not every time all the criteria are applicable.

- **Specific?** Is my goal specific? How am I going to achieve it/by doing what?
- **Measurable?** Is it somehow measurable to control the publication? Beforehand it is important to define parameters or steps that can be used to determine success. This could mean: Has my proposal been accepted? Does my paper meet all requirements of the publisher?
- **Attainable?** To check if a goal is attainable various factors need to be considered. It might help to talk to other people who tried something similar if what you want to do really is feasible.
- **Realistic?** To answer this question, it is important to look on some of the other criteria, for example terminable.
- **Timely?** Until when do I want to achieve my goal? Is there a specific deadline until I want to reach my goal?
- In the end the goal often just needs to be rephrased, specified or operationalised. In this case it would be better to say the following: "I will publish a project-related paper by writing a proposal and looking for Calls and by sending my proposal to at least 4 journals in the next 6 weeks.

This activity can be easily adapted online, without significant changes compared to face-to-face. A web-based application with a virtual whiteboard can be used to illustrate the SMART-definition which can be helpful but is not mandatory. Web-based applications that provide such a feature are for example Mural, Miro, Vispa, GoToMeeting, BigBlueButton, Braincert or Samepage.



ADAPTABLE  
ONLINE

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Lawlor and Hornyak 2012 and MacLeod 2013. Based on Mindtools, <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm>.

**Additional ideas / information:**

- Not every criterion has to be used every time
- If the criteria are met than the objective as a great basis for the task, project, work, etc.
- When using SMART clear, attainable and meaningful goals can be created as well as motivation, action plan and support needed to achieve them.
- This tool can be used in online or face-to-face group sessions, as well as on an individual basis.



SMART CRITERIA

**MY GOAL IS TO:**

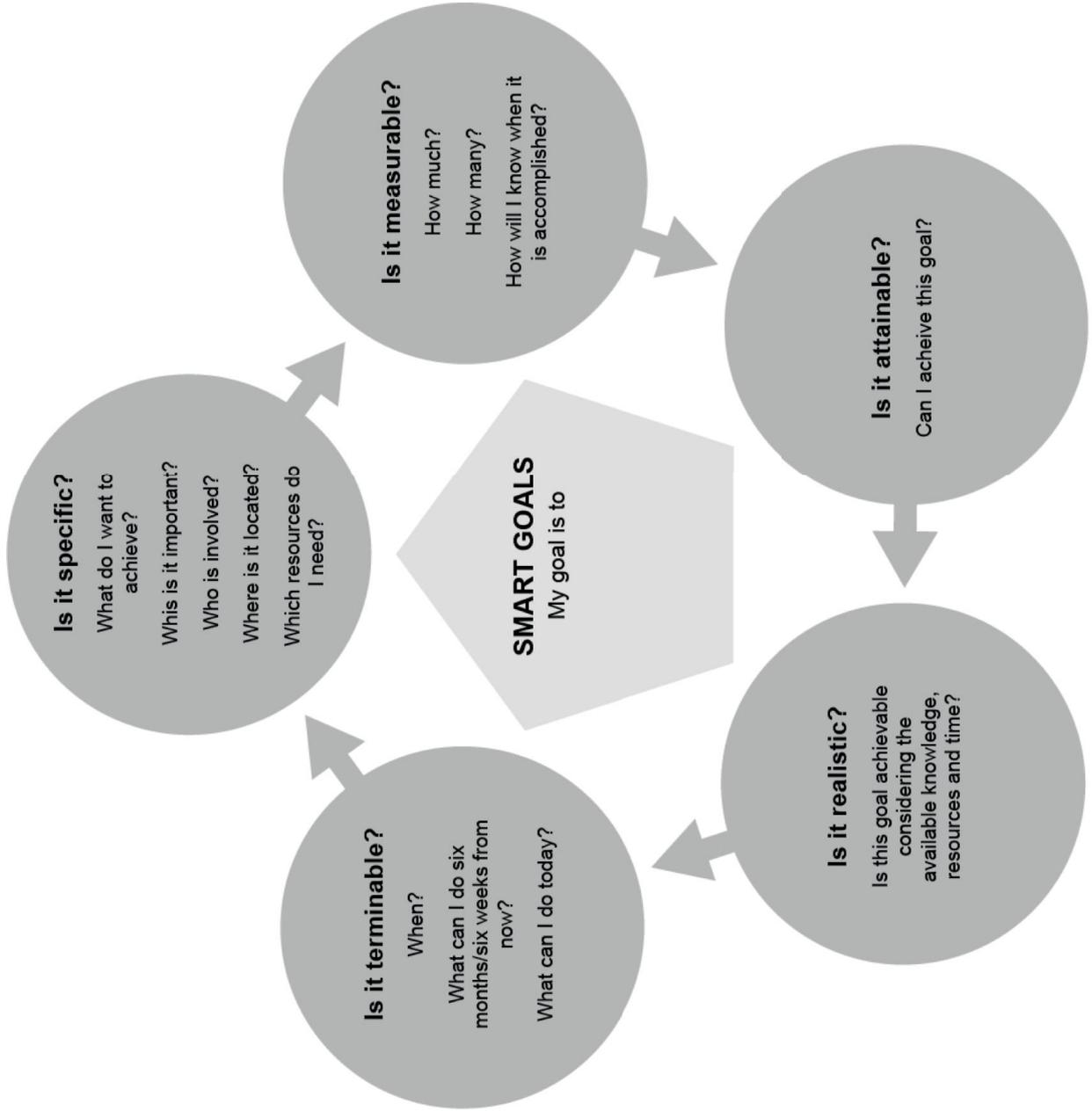
**IS IT MEASURABLE?**  
How much? How many? Quantify your goals. How will you know when you've reached it is accomplished?

**IS IT SPECIFIC?**  
What exactly do I want to achieve? For whom exactly? Why is this important? Who is involved? Where is it located? Which resources do I need?

**IS IT ATTAINABLE?**  
Can I achieve this goal? Have I got access to the resources?

**IS IT REALISTIC?**  
Is this goal achievable considering the available knowledge, resources and time?

**IS IT TERMINABLE?**  
When? What can I do six months from now? What can I do six weeks from now? What can I do today?



## REFERENCES

Lawlor, K. Blaine, and Martin J. Hornyak. 2012. "Smart Goals: How The Application of Smart Goals Can Contribute to Achievement of Student Learning Outcomes." *Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning*, 39: 259-267.

MacLeod, Les. 2013. "Making SMART Goals Smarter." *Physician executive*, 38(2): 68-70.

SMART Goals. 2019. Available from: <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm>.