Strategic Planning



Tip Sheet

The following information provides some general guidelines about key elements of a strategic plan.

Background

Strategic planning determines where an organization is going over the next several years, how it's going to get there and how it'll know if it got there or not. The plan includes specific products that will direct prevention activities. Even though you may have previously developed vision and objectives, the planning process provides an opportunity for partners and staff to establish common language and involvement

A deliberate set of steps that

* assesses needs and resources;
* defines a target audience and a set of goals and objectives;
* plans and designs coordinated strategies with evidence of success;
* logically connects these strategies to needs, assets, and desired outcomes; and
* measures and evaluates the process and outcomes.

Strategic Planning

The shelf life of a Strategic Plan can vary from one to three to five years. The steps:

1. Preparation for planning
2. Vision
3. SWOT analysis
4. Mission
5. Goals & Objectives
6. Action plans/activities
7. Evaluation

1. Preparation for Planning:

In order to be ready for the planning process:

* Be sure all the participants understand the basics of strategic planning; share a draft agenda prior to the sessions, along with any relevant reading materials.
* Schedule at least two three-hour sessions (this is a minimum estimate) with plenty of notice to your participants. Secure a facility that facilitates open thinking and that is comfortable for all.
* Consider whether you need an independent facilitator, or whether this task can be shared among participants.

Finally, figure out a plan to evaluate your sessions.

*Who Should Be Involved in Planning?*

Strategic planning should be conducted by a planning team. Consider the following guidelines when developing the team.

* Establish clear expectations and clarify roles for participants; there are roles for those directly involved in planning, those who will provide key information to the process, those who will review the plan document, those who will authorize the document, etc. Each participant should understand the overall direction of the process and her/his independent roles.
* always include at least one person who ultimately has authority to make strategic decisions, for example, to select which goals will be achieved and how.
* Ensure that as many stakeholders as possible are involved in the planning process.
* Involve someone to administrate the process, including arranging meetings, helping to record key information, helping with flipcharts, monitoring status of preparation, etc.

The number of meetings depends on the amount of prior planning and the number of pending strategic issues. In addition, every “culture” has preferences about short or long meetings, and how much time they can commit. Given these parameters, the planning should be completed over no more that two to three months, with sessions spaced no more than two to three weeks apart or momentum will be lost.

2. Vision

Your department or agency may already have a vision statement with which you want to align. If there isn’t such a vision statement, you can begin your planning with the development of a vision statement.

Vision is a long range picture of how the “world will be” if you’re successful in your work.

3. SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

SWOT analysis can be done at both internal and external levels. SWOT provides additional context for strategic decision making. An *internal analysis* helps you plan for the future by articulating how the organization operates right now. It can reveal trends, irregularities, limitations, and opportunities. To perform an internal analysis, gather information about the organization's strengths and weaknesses, services, programs, activities, staffing, and finances. This can be done via self-assessment by planning participants, or by gathering input from stakeholders ahead of the planning session through a survey.

An *external analysis* helps you understand how the organization is perceived externally and what societal factors may affect its future. External factors may include things like the economy, funding trends, demographics, social factors, technology changes, competition, politics, regulatory factors, and public opinion.

Here is some information on SWOT Analysis taken from the University of Kansas Community Tool Box ( [http://ctb.ku.ed](http://ctb.ku.edu/)u):

What is a SWOT analysis and why should you use one?

The name says it: Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat. A SWOT analysis guides you to identify the positives and negatives inside your organization (S-W) and outside of it, in the external environment (O-T). Developing a full awareness of your situation can help with both strategic planning and decision-making.

When do you use SWOT?

A SWOT analysis can offer helpful perspectives at any stage of an effort. You might use it to:

* Explore possibilities for new efforts or solutions to problems.
* Make decisions about the best path for your initiative. Identifying your opportunities for success in context of threats to success can clarify directions and choices.
* Determine where change is possible. If you are at a juncture or turning point, an inventory of your strengths and weaknesses can reveal priorities as well as possibilities.
* Adjust and refine plans mid-course. A new opportunity might open wider avenues, while a new threat could close a path that once existed.

SWOT also offers a simple way of communicating about your initiative or program and an excellent way to organize information you've gathered from studies or surveys.

What are the elements of a SWOT analysis?

A SWOT analysis focuses on the four elements of the acronym, but the graphic format you use varies depending on the depth and complexity of your effort.

Remember that the purpose of performing a SWOT is to reveal positive forces that work together and potential problems that need to be addressed or at least recognized. Before you conduct a SWOT session, decide what format or layout you will use to communicate these issues most clearly for you.

We will discuss the process of creating the analysis below, but first here are a few sample layouts-ideas of what your SWOT analysis can look like.

You can list internal and external opposites side by side. Ask participants to answer these simple questions: what are the strengths and weaknesses of your group, community, or effort, and what are the opportunities and threats facing it?

4. Mission

Your department or agency may already have a mission statement that you want to align with. If there isn’t such a mission statement you can work with your participants to draft a mission statement.

A mission is at the core of why you’re doing the work you do. A mission statement reflects purpose and may include some strategy reflection. Crafting a good mission statement can be challenging. Sometimes it is helpful to seek consensus on core elements, and then have volunteers later put the core pieces together for the group’s later review.

5. Goals & Objectives

Goals are simply a clear statement of the mission, specifying the accomplishments to be achieved if the mission is to become real. The target objectives are even clearer statements of the specific activities required to achieve the goals, starting from the current status.

At this point, strategic planning begins to produce lots of ideas and action steps. Often the scope of this activity can be managed by delegating different topics to different teams.

Objectives basically address the difference between where we are (current status), and where we want to be (vision and goals), by spelling out what we do (target objectives and action plans) to get there.

Objectives are specific, measurable results produced while implementing strategies. While identifying objectives, keep asking “Are you sure you can do this?”

For best results integrate the objectives as performance criteria in each “implementer’s” job description and performance review.

*Some Definitions:*

Goal: Goal is the end toward which the program is directed. It is the general statement of a long-range purpose. Goals should directly address needs. Goals are outcome and not process oriented. They clearly state, specific, measurable outcome(s) or change(s) that can be reasonably expected at the conclusion of a methodically selected intervention.

Objective: Objective is a statement of the results to be achieved, and includes a time frame, target of change, specific results to be achieved, method of measuring the results, and criteria for successful achievement. Objectives state results, not activities. Objectives, when accomplished, lead to the goal. Objectives should be stated in ways that describe what you will do and how you will do it. A performance indicator is an example of a program objective.

6. Action plans/ Activities

Action plans basically translate the Strategic Plan into implementation steps. Ideally the people who will be responsible for implementing the plan are involved in developing the strategic plan.

Use a cross-functional team to ensure the plan is realistic and collaborative. A few tips about Action Plans:

* Organize the overall strategic plan into smaller action plans for each objective.
* Specify who is doing what and by when.
* While these may be separate documents, keep them linked in everyone’s mind.
* Build in regular reviews of status of the implementation of the plan.
* Translate the strategic plan’s actions into job descriptions and personnel performance reviews, especially for key leaders.
* Communicate the role of follow-ups to the plan. If people know the action plans will be regularly reviewed, implementers tend to do their jobs before they’re checked on.
* Be sure to document and distribute the plan, including inviting review input from all.
* Be sure that one internal person is identified as the lead in managing implementation.
* Integrate the plan’s goals and objectives into the chief executive’s performance reviews.

*Format of Action Plans*

There are many ways to structure an Action Plan, but many look like a work plan along these lines:

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| Goal #\_\_ |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Objectives | Tasks/ | Timeline | Lead | Strategies | Measure / | Resources |  |
| Activities | Role | Used | Document | needed |  |
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7. Evaluation

Thinking about evaluation must begin in Step 1. Evaluation plans are required as part of implementation, but more importantly, an evaluation plan helps you see if you’re on track and achieving the goals you intended to. Fortunately, good work during Step One Assessment makes it easier to track outcomes, as you hopefully have set up a system to return to measures and note change. Data collection in this regard should be integrated in the Action Plan with clear timeframes and responsibilities spelled out.