

NO PLAN, NO DOLLARS:
HOW TO A STRATEGIC PLAN CAN PROPEL
YOUR FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

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Summary



Often times organizations seek funding without having an organizational plan. This often leads the organization into challenges around organizational focus and improper expenditures of funds. This tutorial will assist individuals and organizations in developing a strategic plan that will both lay out the foundation for proper resource development and ensure confidence in funders on your organization's direction and stability.

Section One: Who to Invite to the Party?

Designing the Strategic Planning Process

- Have you developed a strategic plan before?
What has worked or not worked in the past that might inform the design of your strategic planning process?
- On the following slides are some of the choices to be made when designing a strategic planning process.

Who makes what decisions—who decides the strategic direction for the organization, and what degree of input is sought from the board and the staff?

Known as internal stakeholders, the following are those that should IMMEDIATELY help decide the strategic direction of the organization:

- Board – As the base and legal “guardian” of the organization, all board members should be involved.
- Executive and Senior Staff – Should be involved in all aspects of strategic plan, with feedback upon request on board direction.
- Staff – Opportunities for staff feedback on the direction of the organization is critical to eventual buy-in of strategic plan. Select staff members serving on a committee or cross-organizational dialogue are potential strategies.

Should you involve external stakeholders in addition to internal the stakeholders of board and staff?



The answer is a resounding “YES!”. The following, known as external stakeholders, are those that should help decide the strategic direction of the organization:

Funders and Key Donors



Funders have made an investment into the organization and feedback from this important group should be sought. Avenues to solicit feedback can start with the impersonal (surveys, phone discussions) to the more formal (feedback lunches).

Community Partners



There are a variety of outside organizations and institutions that have a hand in the success of your organization. Involving them in informal and formal feedback outlets will ensure future buy-in but may also prevent future duplication of services.

Program Participants



One of the most forgotten groups in the strategic planning process, the feedback from participants can be “gold”. Including them in informal and formal feedback processes can ensure that the organization is one that they not only receive services but also can have a hand in it’s direction. This can have immeasurable outcomes on organizational culture and program delivery.

How long does a strategic planning process have to be?



One of the apprehensions of undertaking a strategic planning session is the potential time constraints of the organization. The following are three categories that will help determine how much time your organization should take.

Abbreviated Process



Often times an organization may need a minor “tune-up” of a previous strategic plan? A good strategic planning process should have periodic times where the plan is revisited and updated. This process can take under a month and should happen every 12 to 18 months.

Moderate Process



There are many organizations who finish a strategic planning process and the plan ends up sitting on the shelf, only to be seen as an attachment to a grant proposal. If this is the case, it won't take a funder long to see this.

To have a plan really take hold of an organization, the plan must live and breath throughout the organization each day. If an organization has a plan, but does not follow it, then a new strategic planning process addresses organizational structural issues that prevent the strategic plan from taking hold. This process can take approximately 3 months.

Extensive Process



If an organization has never looked “under its hood”, then an extensive strategic planning process is in order. The extensive effort is going to look at the “ghosts” of organizational past, present and future in order to clearly understand and outline the direction of the organization. From early testing to year-end follow-up, this process can take 9-12 months, with the more intensive work being in the first half of the year.

Who will lead the process and who will be the primary writer of the plan ?



Determining roles and responsibilities is an important part of the strategic planning process. The two largest roles are the process leaders and writers. Who should those roles be assigned to? The following two slides may surprise you.

Process Leader



Often times in group work, the loudest individuals are the ones that end up leading the group's work. In a strategic planning process, internal and external parties should take shared responsibilities in leading the process. Those that have the loudest voices should be facilitated to sharing meaningful and equal dialogue with new voices. A consultant or un-biased volunteer should facilitate these discussions.

Plan Writer



Similar to the Process Leader, the various departments should have a series of writers. For example, the development or finance planning sessions should include multiple chances for the writing of the development and finance plan, with everyone having a chance to assist in this role. Each plan is to be brought together toward the end of the process in which all would have feedback on each plan. A consultant or un-biased volunteer would work on both bringing the written pieces together, that format is tied together and multiple voices were heard and presented.

What is the proper sequencing of discussions – the strategic questions your organization needs to address during the planning process?

Do you have data collection first and then have a retreat? Do you kick off the planning process with a board/staff retreat and then create issue-focused board/staff task forces to collect and analyze data and make recommendations to the board of directors?

Determining how to start a strategic planning process can send one running for the hills. Whether to have a retreat or pre-testing as a way to start out is less important as making sure certain process points are in place, which includes the involvement of all stakeholders. The following three slides outline these discussions.

“Ghosts of Organizational Past”



What ends up preventing strategic plans from succeeding is that organizations immediately jump to analyzing the present and preparing for the future, but neglect to look back at the organization's history. Identifying previous successes and challenges, key people and events and organizational “eras” is an important part of making sure that the organization can repeat past successes and alleviate continual challenges going forward. Teddy Pendergrass said it best when he said, “You don't know where your going until you know where you've been”.

“Ghosts of Organizational Present”

Organizations that often look at themselves in the mirror often only see two things, negative and positive and often times not both. An organization that truly wants to get a good picture of themselves in present day should conduct a simple SWOT Analysis and look at the where the organization is successful, where the organization has challenges and what threats that cannot be changed present themselves to the organization. The final action would be how can the challenges be switched into opportunities, a virtual “lemons into lemonade” activity. This activity will be a future backbone to the strategic planning process.

“Ghosts of Organizational Future”

Another downfall to the strategic planning process is that many people around the table have multiple, and unshared, visions of success of the organization. Having everyone in the room involved in an activity that outlines all of their visions for the effort by asking “In 10 years, I want people to be saying this about ABC Organization.....” is a simple way to begin the discussion on what everyone is thinking about the future of the organization.

Case Studies & Web Links:

Below outline some links to Best Practices for Section One:

- http://arts.endow.gov/resources/Lessons/WARSHA_WSKI.HTML
- http://www.axi.ca/TCA/nov2004/associatearticle_2.shtml
- <http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/ts.html>

Section Two: Looking Under the Hood

Asking the Right Questions During the Process

Many of the strategic issues discussed during a strategic planning process address some or all of following four questions, as seen on the following slides.

Mission



How are you achieving our mission and how could you have a greater impact?

Administrative Capacity



Do you have the administrative capacity to effectively and efficiently support your programs and services? What would it take to maximize your organizational capabilities?

Financial



Are your operations financially viable, and how can you ensure the long-term financial stability of your organization?

Governance



How is your board ensuring that your charitable dollars are used effectively and efficiently and that the organization is fulfilling its mission?

Multiple Stakeholder Analysis



Part of a good present day analysis of an organization can be done by involving multiple stakeholders in providing an in-depth view of the organization and programs' assets and challenges.

Case Studies & Web Links:

Below outline some links to Best Practices for Section Two:

- http://home.att.net/~nickols/goals_grid.htm
- <http://www.compasspoint.org/askgenie/index.php?tpid=12>
- http://www.marketingteacher.com/Lessons/lessons_wot.htm

Section Three: Kicking the Tires & Preparing the Case *After Review, Outlining Your Current & Future Needs and Assets*

Summarizing the data you have collected during your strategic planning process, you will begin collecting your findings by the categories of mission, money, administration, and governance.

Finally, gather data according to your strategic/future directions and summarize your findings.

Guiding Questions

The following questions can be used as guiding the thought process:

- What is the program's current level of activity?
- What is its proposed growth strategy (expand, maintain, decrease, eliminate, start new efforts, modify existing efforts)?
- What is the efforts' projected future level of activity?
- Looking at long-range financial projections, what are the needed organizational and program costs, including staffing needs?

Case for Support



Once you have laid out the strategic directions and budgetary needs of the organization, the case for support should become apparent. This will become the backbone behind your case for support and for which funders should be sought to assist the direction of your organization.

Case Studies & Web Links:

Below outline some links to Best Practices for Section Three:

- <http://www.squarewheels.com/scottswriting/mission.html>
- <http://www.idealists.org/if/idealists/en/FAQ/QuestionViewer/default?section=03&item=21>
- <http://www.change-management-toolbook.com/?tabid=475>
- http://www.managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan/writing.htm

Conclusion: Strategic Planning Can Help to Secure Future Funding, but Should Secure Your Organization's Future Directions.

The strategic planning process should be done to secure the path for your organization's future and not just as an exercise to secure financial resources.

What has happened in the processes described in the previous slides is that the organization has now created strategic avenues by which to seek future funding, outlining where organizational need is present through existing challenges and future directions.

Questions and Discussion



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