

Strategic Planning

Phase 1

Getting Ready: summarize organizational history and need for strategic planning

Phase 2

Revisit mission, vision and values

Phase 3

Assessing the environment

- Review previous and current strategies
- Gather input from internal and external partners
- Gather information about program effectiveness
- Identify issues or questions

Phase 4

Agreeing on Priorities

- Analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
- Choose criteria for setting priorities
- Write goals and objectives

Phase 5

Writing Strategic Plan

- Write, review and adopt strategic plan

Implementation

- Write annual operating plan with staff and budget to implement plan

Evaluation

- Develop outcome measures to evaluate effectiveness of organization

Strategic Planning Summary

While each group varies in how it does strategic planning, it generally takes 6 months to 1 year to complete. It is usually helpful to have a strategic planning committee that is made up of leadership of the organization and interested members to keep the work moving and help the organization as a whole incorporate the strategic planning activities into its general on-going work.

Often groups hire an outside consultant who can facilitate the planning process as well as conduct some of the external interviews with key constituents and stakeholders in order to provide a confidential and neutral forum for which to give feedback. It is important to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges as part of strategic planning, and outside stakeholders are more likely to be straightforward in their assessment with someone they see as less aligned with the organization.

The main objectives in strategic planning are to 1) revisit the vision, mission and values; 2) assess the environment; 3) agree on priorities; and 4) write the plan with implementation steps and evaluation measures. One common mistake groups make when doing strategic planning is to leave out the implementation and measures steps - they are often so focused on just finishing the plan itself that they don't get to implementation steps and measures, don't monitor as the time of the plan goes forward, and find themselves 3 to 5 years later revisiting a document that now

doesn't resonate with where they have gone. Similar to mapping out a trip and then leaving the map at home, hoping you will remember what the map told you.

Funding a strategic planning process is important, and the expenses are usually the following:

- * Percentage of staff time to support the planning process
- * Consultant time for facilitating strategic planning and gathering information from internal and external stakeholders
- * Retreat costs - at least one and possibly two - including space rental, food, materials, travel
- * Strategic Planning Committee meeting expenses - phone, materials, and possibly travel
- * External and internal information gathering - focus groups, surveys, individual interviews (often this is a time cost for either staff or the consultant, and additional costs are generally space rental, food and travel connected to focus groups)

Nonprofit groups typically spend \$15,000-\$25,000 for strategic planning when they include all of the costs listed above. Consultant costs depend on the amount of work that is required by an external person vs. staff and/or key volunteers. In my experience, if a group asks me to conduct the bulk of the work for strategic planning, my fees are generally \$15,000-\$20,000. If volunteers who can handle most of the external information gathering, or if some of the steps are not needed because of recent work that provide the information, this can reduce the costs of an outside consultant.

I help groups find outside funding for the strategic planning, and encourage looking at private foundations that already support the organization since they often have discretionary or technical assistance funds to invest in a group that is currently being supported with programming funds. In the Chicago-area, the Chicago Community Trust is a good example of a private funder that supports strategic planning.

Organizational Capacities

Leadership Capacities: *help an organization to direct its own actions to achieve goals and to attract the cooperation of others to its goal and vision.*

- Staff
- Board/Governance
- Mission/Vision/Values
- Community Role

Results Capacities: *help an organization to deliver impact and to make the desired difference in the world.*

- Fundraising
- Programs

Enabling Capacities: *help and organization to gain the internal strengths necessary for facilitating its other functions.*

- Financial Management
- Systems
- Marketing and Communications

Adaptive Capacities: *help an organization understand the environmental context and adapt nimbly and strategically to changing circumstances.*

- Impact/Evaluation
- Planning

Organizational Capacities¹

Staff: Leadership and Team

The employees of the organization, including staff leader(s) and the policies/procedures that define staff responsibilities, performance, and terms of employment. May also include consultants, contractors, and volunteers who support staff or extend the capacity of staff.

Board/Governance

The organization's management and/or board structure. How the organization is managed and governed, which includes the specific responsibilities defined both by law and by the culture/structure of the organization.

Mission/Vision/Values

Mission, Vision and Values statements help define the purpose and direction of a successful organization. These statements intentionally affect strategic decisions.

¹ Adapted from *Smart Growth: A Life-Stage Model for Social Change Philanthropy*, Women's Funding Network, San Francisco, California: 2004.

Community Role

The organization chooses an appropriate level and type of organizational leadership and influence to exercise within the community or in its desired sphere of social change. This role may include partnerships and alliances to gain support for an issue or cause as well as the bridging process between other community groups or emerging networks relevant to the organization.

Fundraising

Includes the processes by which an organization generates funds and sustains diverse financial and material resources.

Programs

The service and/or policy programs the organization offers to the community. Evaluation of programs helps guide future planning.

Financial Management and Resource Development

Where and how an organization funds itself. Including the management of funds and cultivation of best financial practices so as to maximize the value and growth of actual resources.

Marketing and Communication

The marketing plans and strategies that help the organization gain visibility. Also refers to how the organization communicates with the community at large.

Systems: Administrative, Technology and Infrastructure

The internal systems used by the organization. These systems include, but are not limited to, what technology systems are used, what internal communication systems are in place, what data collection tools are used, and what systems are developed to ensure that the administrative functions of the organization run smoothly.

Impact/Evaluation

Ways for an organization to assess, evaluate or measure the social change they are achieving through their work. This is done so an organization can continuously improve their work while proving to others that their work is of value.

Planning

How the organization plans for its future, including development and integration of the organization's mission and vision. This also includes planning both for short and long-term sustainability.