



Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is an organization's process of defining its strategy, or direction, for the next 3-5 years, and making decisions on how it will allocate its resources to pursue this chosen strategy. In other words, strategic planning asks and answers the following questions: "Where are we now?", "Where do we want to go?", and "How will we do it?" Each organization varies in how it does strategic planning, but it generally takes 6 months to 1 year to complete the process.

Phases

Strategic Planning is usually completed in the following five phases:

- **Phase 1 - Getting Ready**
 - Summarize organizational history and need for strategic planning
 - Revisit mission, vision and values
- **Phase 2 - Assessing the environment**
 - Review previous and current strategies
 - Gather input from internal and external stakeholders
 - Gather information about program effectiveness
 - Identify issues or questions
- **Phase 3 - Agreeing on Priorities**
 - Analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges/threats (SWOT)
 - Choose criteria and set organizational priorities
- **Phase 4 - Writing Strategic Plan**
 - Write goals and objectives
 - Review, revise, and adopt strategic plan
- **Phase 5 – Implementation and Evaluation**
 - Write annual operating plan with staff and budget in order to implement strategic plan
 - Develop outcome measures to evaluate effectiveness of plan in relation to activities of the organization

One common strategic planning mistake is to leave out Phase 5 - the implementation and evaluation step. Groups that don't complete this phase often find themselves 3 to 5 years later revisiting a document that doesn't resonate with where their organization has gone.



Roles in Strategic Planning

Most organizations find it helpful to have a Strategic Planning Committee comprised of:

- Staff leadership of the organization (usually the Executive Director, and perhaps other senior staff)
- Board members
- Other interested individuals who may not be affiliated with the organization in a staff or Board capacity (perhaps a client, donor, volunteer)

The Committee as a whole keeps the work moving and helps the organization incorporate the strategic planning activities in a general on-going way. For more information on this topic, please refer to the affiliated document "Roles in Strategic Planning."

Do we need to hire a consultant?

Organizations often hire an outside consultant because that person can add objectivity and autonomy to the process while also alleviating the stress of the additional work load for staff. A consultant may act as a mere facilitator who directs the process and runs the meetings but does not impose his or her opinions in any way. A consultant may also act as the professional guide who shares expertise on key issues, conducts information gathering through interviews and other methods, and coaches the board and staff on final production of the plan. McAlpine Consulting for Growth has worked in both capacities with a variety of clients. We specialize in listening to our clients and tailoring the strategic planning process to fit their needs.

In a typical strategic plan, we provide the following services:

- Creation of a strategic planning timeline
- Overall project coordination and scheduling of meetings
- Facilitation of all Committee meetings and Retreats
- Assessment of organizational capacities and growth stage
- Formation of external assessment questions, and implementation of external assessment methods (survey, focus group, interviews)
- Assistance with setting organizational priorities
- Writing the strategic plan with Executive Director and Committee
- Development of implementation plan and evaluation measures



Costs and Funding

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)

Non- profit groups typically spend \$15,000-\$30,000 for strategic planning when they include all of the costs listed above. Consultant costs depend on the amount of work that is being asked of them. McAlpine Consulting typically charges \$15,000 - \$25,000 for Strategic Planning if we assume the bulk of the work. Our fee can be significantly reduced if staff/volunteers handle most of the external information gathering or if some of the steps are not needed because of recent work that has been completed.

McAlpine Consulting can help organizations find outside funding for the strategic planning. We first encourage you to approach private foundations that already fund your group since they often have discretionary or technical assistance funds to invest in current grantees. In the Chicago-area, the Chicago Community Trust is a good example of a private funder that supports strategic planning.



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