



# LISTEN



When an organization's leadership knows about the people you serve and other relevant data about your program and organization, your strategy improves, and you gain respect among your key audiences. You will be able to tell your story better, and your relationships and community impact will grow.



## *Strategic Planners know at the LISTEN stage that:*

1. **Input from key stakeholders (all the different people or groups that have a stake in your success) is a vital part of Strategic Planning.** Asking for input yields information and insights that lead to a better plan and engages clients, donors, and others in the nonprofit's sphere in powerful ways. Focus groups, community meetings, interviews, and online surveys are ways to listen to stakeholders.
2. **Your organization's overall health matters.** Completing an analysis of your financial health and/or an organizational assessment will inform planning.
3. **There are other organizations working in the same space as you**, whether in a competitive way or as partners. Your organization's position within the larger landscape is a key consideration.
4. **You will never have perfect or complete information.** While research and stakeholder listening is worthwhile and important, you will never have the time, energy, and resources to consult all possible stakeholders or know all there is to know about your field or community. Do a realistic amount of listening and learning before moving into the development of your plan.



## *Strategic Planners demonstrate what they know in these ways:*

- A. The Planning Team has developed a list of stakeholders—key constituency groups—and taken steps to solicit input from them. The input is summarized in a way that the board and staff can learn from it.
- B. The Board and Staff has honest and clear sense of the organization's current strengths and weaknesses, reputation and position in the community.



*Strategic Planners produce some or all the following documents at this stage:*

- Summary of stakeholder input
- Summary of organizational strengths and weaknesses and financial position
- Inventory of program goals and outcomes
- SWOT Analysis

There are a few key **tools** that might help you produce these documents:

- Stakeholder Engagement Primer
- Sample Stakeholder Outreach Plan
- Nonprofit Health Check-up
- SWOT Analysis Worksheet



*These ideas have worked for other Strategic Planners:*

- Hold a large community meeting to solicit input from all your stakeholders at one time. Get different constituents talking to each other to encourage out-of-the-box thinking about where your organization could go in the future.
- Recognize that you are part of a larger movement for change. Spend some time talking about (or with!) collaborators and competitors. Explore what you admire about each of them and how your organization could help them do that better. Learn about best practices in your field.

**Congratulations! You're ready for the next stage...ENVISION.**