

Strategic Planning Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



What is strategic planning?

A process where an organization's leadership:

- defines mission and goals
- agrees on strategy

A disciplined process with the following steps:

1. Ask a series of questions
2. Test assumptions
3. Gather current data
4. Anticipate future environment
5. Make decisions/choices re: What is most important for success?

Reaching strategic goals requires:

- Vision for the future
- Strategy to get there
- Organizational capacity to implement

Why is strategic planning important?

Strategic planning gives you the opportunity to:

- Reconnect with vision and mission of the organization
- Increase ownership of organization
- Meet changing needs
- Define success together
- Ensure that you are all going in the same direction

What are the important components of a strategic plan?

1. Mission
2. Vision
3. Strategic Priorities
4. Objectives in support of each Strategic Priority

What are some of the action steps in a typical planning process?

1. Gather relevant information: SWOT analysis/data gathering/community input
2. Review and/or update mission and vision
3. Determine best strategies to reach your mission (strategic priorities, objectives)
4. Develop budget/resource plan & evaluation measures
5. Implement the plan
6. Evaluate your work and incorporate what you learned into the next plan



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How does planning usually take place?

- Board committee formed to steer process
- Consultant can help facilitate
- Can take 3 months to 1 year
- Usually includes a board retreat to make key decisions
- Annual cycle of planning, budgeting, implementing, evaluating

What is the best time horizon for planning?

These days, most organizations choose to create three-year strategic plans, or a three-year strategic framework (high level plan) with a companion implementation plan that is updated annually.

How can we make our plan a living document?

- Identify a steward or steward committee for the plan
- Develop benchmarks or milestones to track your progress
- Monitor your goals regularly
- Organize board committees around strategic goals
- Organize your meetings around strategic goals
- Tie CEO expectations to strategic plan
- Revisit the plan annually

Why is everybody making such a big deal out of evaluation?

Evaluation helps you:

- know if you are effective
- make improvements to your programs
- make good decisions about allocating resources
- hold each other accountable
- market your programs
- attract funders who want to invest in proven strategies
- take risks

What kinds of evaluation questions should we be asking ourselves?

- What's working?
- What's not working?
- What did we learn?
- What changed as a result of our efforts?
- What different approaches should we consider?

***"If you don't know where you are going, it doesn't matter which way you go."
Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland***

