

Strategic Planning

What is it? Why does it matter? What's the best way to do it?

Strategic planning is when the leaders of the organization, generally the board in discussion with the senior staff, develop a high level plan for the organization's future. The plan often includes a **vision**, a **mission**, **values**, **definition** of the business (including products, services, and customers), and strategic **priorities**. The strategic priorities are the key areas of focus for the organization to make significant progress towards more fully achieving its mission in the next 3 to 5 years. The strategic plan includes 3- to 5-year and 1-year goals in each of the strategic priorities. Once the board finalizes the strategic plan the management team develops an operating or implementation plan that outlines the action steps to be taken to achieve the goals.

An effective strategic planning process accomplishes the following:

- Defines the ideal future for the organization
- Assesses the current reality
- Determines ways of closing the gap between the ideal future and the current reality
- Establishes a monitoring or accountability process which enhances implementation

Consider using a STRIVE! facilitator to work with your board to create a strategic plan. This seasoned consultant will provide a discussion framework for the board, senior staff, and perhaps other stakeholders as they identify and clearly articulate the elements of the strategic plan.

"At our board meeting we did a debrief of the Strategic Planning meeting. All board members were highly complementary of the job you did of facilitating the two days. We look forward to using the results of that meeting to raise the tide. Thanks again for a great job." **Chair** – Trillium Mutual Insurance

The Strategic Planning Process

An effective strategic planning process defines the ideal future for the organization, assesses the current reality, determines ways of closing the gap between the two, and establishes a mechanism that ensures implementation. **See these steps in detail below.** A third-party facilitator will generally guide the board, senior staff, and perhaps other stakeholders through these steps at a planning retreat.



1. Celebrate your past.

Our future is shaped by the past. We tend to look to the past to determine how to live today. By celebrating the past successes, we are able to move beyond the past and look to the organization's future in the interests of the owners.



2. Articulate your vision.

The purpose strategic planning is to move the organization towards its ideal future. We define our "vision" by dreaming about what we would like the future to be and articulating a mutually desirable vision. When articulating the future, the clearer...the more specific... the more aligned...the greater the organizational success!



3. Declare your mission.

The "mission" defines what the organization is going to do to fulfill the vision. It provides focus and identifies where we must concentrate our efforts so we can move quickly toward the reality of our "vision." All of the organization's activities will support achieving that mission.



4. Analyze your current situation.

Once we know where we wish to be, we take stock of where we are. Assessing the present requires evaluating the organization itself and the world around us. Examine the

current situation by understanding the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of your organization. Look at trends and consider the implications.



5. Identify your key issues or challenges.

There will always be **issues, challenges or gaps** between the present and your desired future. Each of these gaps represents either an obstacle to be overcome or a critical opportunity in order to achieve our **desired future**.



6. Determine your key result areas.

These are the new or existing areas that the organization will focus upon. Barriers that have prevented progress will be given significant attention. Substantial medium term initiatives (3-5 year) will set the direction for the organization.



7. Uncover your indicators of success.

Organizations typically have many issues to deal with and inadequate resources to handle them all. Since some issues have higher impact than others, it is necessary to focus on what is absolutely essential to achieve the mission and vision. The indicators of success are signposts that will mark the expected progress against intended targets.



8. Develop your action plan.

The staff are responsible for how to achieve the goals. An action plan states who is responsible for leading work on each goal and when they must give progress reports to whom. The operational plan is developed by the senior staff and reviewed by the board. The leaders have delegated the implementation to the staff to put the plan in action and periodic reporting will keep staff accountable.



9. Follow up.

The leaders have the responsibility to ensure the organization is heading in the right direction. Leaders continually monitor the action plan and check the progress for each goal to provide encourage or redirection in order to maintain focussed energy on the goals and mission of the organization.