

Private: How to do strategic planning

A good strategic plan shows accountability about how you are using your resources, towards which goals, and how you are making a difference.

A strategic plan helps an organisation be clear about what it should be doing, when and how.

It is the board's responsibility to oversee the strategic planning process, which sets the medium to long term direction for the organisation. Strategic planning identifies the 'big picture' issues and opportunities. It will clarify overall purpose and goals, and outline the actions you will take to achieve those goals.

The board is the mind of your organisation: it creates the vision of what the organisation will do.

The executive and staff are the hands of the organisation: they will work out and do what is required to deliver the board's vision

Depending on the size and nature of your organisation, strategic planning can be fairly simple or very complex. While the board will set the vision for the organisation they will usually involve management in strategic planning to benefit from their knowledge and to build commitment to the plan.

When developing your strategic plan, directors need to stay focused on the big picture – the vision of the organisation – and the major actions it will undertake. Don't get caught up in the detail about how management will deliver on the plan. Directors who focus on the operational detail, rather than the vision, will frustrate others and make it hard to finish the plan.

A good strategic plan will help guide your decisions and make sure the operations of the organisation are working in harmony. It shows accountability about how you are using your resources, towards which goals, and how you are making a difference.

Decide how you will go about your strategic planning

Think about what resources, information and time you need and what tools and approaches you are going to use. Who are your stakeholders? Who are you there to serve? How will you find out what is important to them?

You can consult in a variety of ways. You could use surveys or focus groups, or you might invite stakeholders to participate in a workshop or one-to-one interviews. When you have an idea of needs and expectations, your board can hold strategic planning sessions to prioritise needs and actions, determine how and when your organisation will meet those expectations and with what resources.

Strategic planning can be quite challenging so many organisations employ an independent facilitator to guide them through the process.

Scan your environment

Review your organisation's current local, political, social and economic environment. You can run a SWOT and a PEST analysis. These will help you identify what is happening that will impact on your organisation in terms of funding, call on your services, ability to attract staff,

etc. This will challenge you to think about how you are placed to deal with your needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Refer to [How to do a SWOT Analysis](#) and [How to do a PEST analysis](#) for further information.

Plotting your direction

On the basis of your environmental scan, identify the strategic decisions and decide what you need to do to respond to the major issues, challenges and opportunities you face.

Review the vision, mission and value statements

Your

mission statement

states your organisation's purpose: what it does, why and how?

Your **vision statement** is about the future: it paints a picture of what your organisation wants to become, achieve and change. A vision statement should challenge and inspire employees.

Review your vision and mission statements. Do they still reflect what your organisation does, why it does it and where it wishes to be in the future? Does your organisation have clearly defined and understood values?

Draw up values or guiding principles that will provide direction and inspiration to everyone in the organisation, clients, volunteers, paid staff and the board.

Also refer to [How to write a vision statement](#) and [How to write a mission statement](#).

The goals (or objectives, or outcomes)

On the basis of the mission statement, choose your specific priorities. What are the things that need to be accomplished for the organisation to achieve its mission?

Goals or objectives should be designed and worded to be specific, measurable, and realistic.

Think about how you will know when you have met your goals

Your strategic plan is the best place to begin when measuring organisational performance. Finding out how well you are doing in meeting these goals is a good indicator of how well the organisation is doing overall.

- What data, information or evidence can we measure and what will it tell us how we are doing?
- Will this information make sense and tell us what we need to know?
- Will this information help us to be responsive and make changes to fulfil our Mission?
- Will the information help us demonstrate that we are achieving worthwhile outcomes in the eyes of donors and funders?

Do not rely solely on your Strategic Plan for indicators of success or challenges. You should decide on a range of performance measures to inform the board about the health and growth of the organisation.

There is no one set of performance measures or basis for setting standards for these measures. You will need to work out your own measures to best inform you how well you are meeting your goals. See [How to develop performance indicators](#).

Writing up your strategic plan

How you structure your strategic plan is up to you!

Make sure the final document makes sense to the people who will be reading it. If the plan is too large and complicated, it will not be read or implemented, and the process will not have been worthwhile.

Many organisations condense a detailed strategic plan into a one-page document to ensure that it is accessible to, and understood, by all. It will state what you are going to do, when and how, and you will measure success.

You could have a collection of short summary documents or create a range of formats for different audiences. Here are some sections you could include:

1. Your organisation's vision, mission, and the specific changes or outcomes it wants to deliver in the next few years
2. An analysis of the internal and external environment – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT and PEST) – and how your organisation will respond.
3. Your organisation's priorities and key strategic goals: what you aim to achieve within specific time frames. Four to six goals is ideal.
4. The strategies that will help your organisation make these happen.
5. How you will measure if you have achieved your goals and fulfilled plans.

The executive officer is responsible for developing a workplan (also called an operational or implementation plan) to outline how the strategic plan will be put into action and to track the progress of the strategic plan. A workplan includes the tasks, milestones and indicators of success.

Evaluation and review

To keep on track the CEO should report against key areas of the plan at each board meeting. This will enable the board to identify any issues as they arise and, where needed, take action to address them. You will also need to review the Plan annually to measure progress against the plan and review the coming year.

Use it – promote it and invite staff to help achieve it!

You have spent time and resources on developing a strategic plan. Make sure that you share it! A communication strategy will help get it out to people to read it and be inspired and motivated by it. Do not let it gather dust. Display the Plan in your organisation and online. Find ways to use it in planning, decision making, reporting and communicating throughout the time period to guide your work and strengthen your organisation.

Invite staff to participate in a presentation where the plan is explained to them – so that they understand the vision and mission that you have created and how they can help to achieve it.

References

The Institute of Community Directors Australia also has a range of resources to support Strategic Planning:

[Institute of Community Directors Australia – Strategic Planning](#)

Referenced links

- [How to do a SWOT analysis](#)
- [How to do a PEST analysis](#)
- [How to develop performance indicators](#)
- [How to write a vision statement](#)
- [How to write a mission statement](#)