

Strategic Planning

What, Why, Who & When?

What is strategic planning?

Strategic planning determines where an organisation is going over the next several years, how it's going to get there and how it'll know if it got there or not.

There are a variety of perspectives, models and approaches used in strategic planning. The way that a strategic plan is developed depends on the nature of the organisation's leadership, culture of the organisation, complexity of the organisation's environment, size of the organisation, and the expertise of planners. For example, there is a variety of strategic planning models which include:

- goals-based: the most common and starts with focus on the organisation's mission (and vision and/or values), goals to work towards the mission, strategies to achieve the goals, and action planning (who will do what and by when)
- issues-based: often starts by examining issues facing the organisation, strategies to address those issues, and action plans.
- organic: might start by articulating the organisation's vision and values and then creating action plans to achieve the vision while adhering to those values
- scenario planning: some would assert that scenario planning is more a technique than model.

Regardless of which model you choose, and the type or length of the written plan, the process helps to clarify the organisation's activities and ensure that key leaders are all "on the same script". Far more important than the strategic plan document is the strategic planning process itself (see worksheet on approaches for more information).

Why? - Benefits of strategic planning

Strategic planning serves a variety of purposes in organisations, including to:

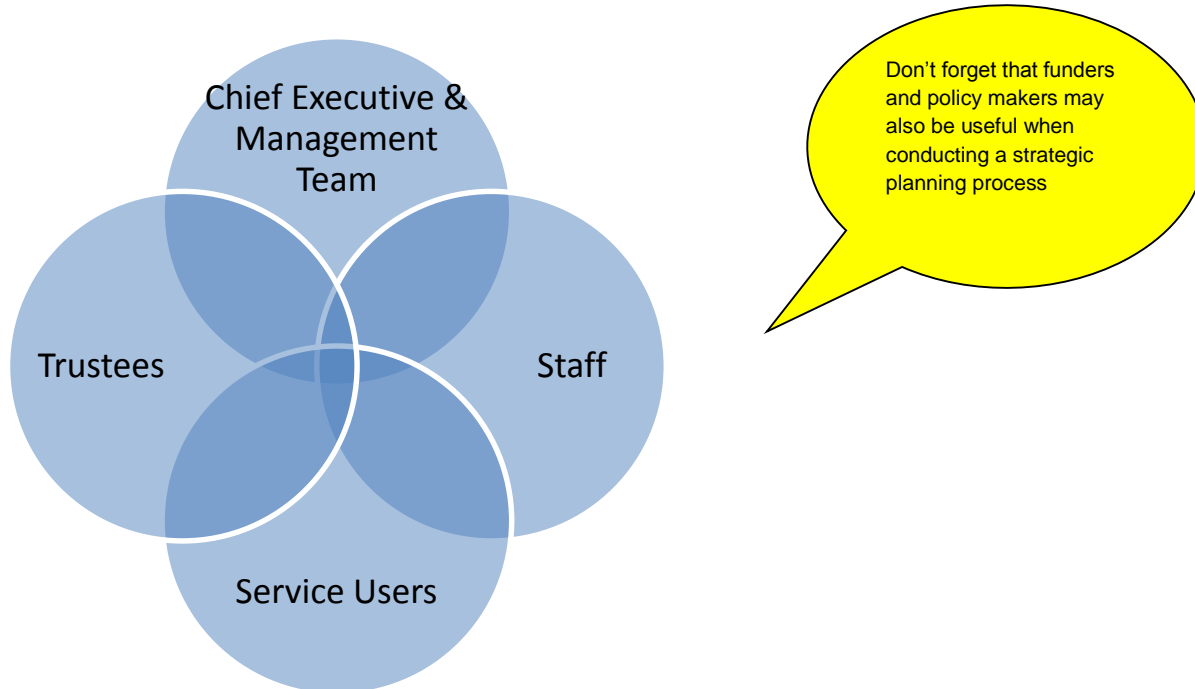
- Clearly define the purpose of the organisation and to establish realistic aims consistent with that mission. It is advisable to have a timeframe on your strategic plan (usually 3 – 5 years).
- Communicate those goals and objectives to the organisation's users/involved parties (stakeholders).
- Develop a sense of ownership of the plan
- Ensure the most effective use is made of the organisation's resources by focusing the resources on the key priorities.
- Bring together everyone's best and most reasoned efforts, which has important value in building a consensus about where an organisation is going.
- Provide a clearer focus of the organisation, producing more efficiency and effectiveness
- Bridge and build strong teams between staff, volunteers and the management committee
- Provide the glue that keeps the board and organisation together
- Produce great satisfaction among planners around a common vision
- Solve major problems.



Who should be involved in strategic planning?

Strategic planning affects the whole organisation, so it is important that everyone feels part of the process. Ultimate responsibility and decision making rests with the board, supported by the Chief Executive, management and staff. Other external stakeholders such as service users and beneficiaries have an important part to play, as do funders, policy makers and potential partners.

The key players include:



| Chief Executive & Management Team roles include | Staff roles include: | Trustees who are responsible for: | Service-users' role includes: |
|--|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning • Leadership and management • Giving perspective • Implementing the strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving perspective • Giving information • Implementing the strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic thinking • Leadership and direction • Decision making • Owning implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving their views • Engaging in decision-making |

Strategic Planning: A trustee board perspective

- Trustees are legally accountable for the direction and work of the organisation
- Trustees are usually at arm's length to the work so can have a useful overview
- They may have experience of the longer term history and issues of the organisation
- They can contribute moods or views 'from the outside' when assessing public support considerations



Considerations when undertaking strategic planning:

- Strategic planning needs the best information, experience and expertise that the partnership of staff, chief executives, trustees and users TOGETHER can provide; strategic planning cannot be conducted by one person
- There is never only one right answer
- There is no perfect strategy – every solution generates new challenges
- The trust and goodwill of all involved is crucial – it builds commitment to the planning

The process and strategic conversation that goes on in an organisation is just as important (or if not more important) than the actual written plan itself.

When should strategic planning be undertaken?

The scheduling for the strategic planning process depends on the nature and needs of the organisation and its immediate external environment. For example, planning should be carried out frequently in an organisation whose services are in an industry that is changing rapidly. In this situation, planning might be carried out once or even twice a year and done in a very comprehensive and detailed fashion (that is, with attention to mission, vision, values, environmental scan, issues, aims, strategies, responsibilities, timelines etc). On the other hand, if the organisation has been around for many years and is in a fairly stable environment, then planning might be carried out once every two to three years and only certain parts of the planning process might be updated each year (eg action planning regarding the objectives, responsibilities, timelines, budgets, etc).

Consider the following guidelines:

- Strategic planning should be done when an organisation is just getting started;
- Strategic planning should also be done in preparation for a new major project or phase, for example, developing a new department, division, or major new project;
- The full strategic planning process should be conducted at least once every three to five years. As noted above, these activities could be part conducted each year for activity plans or if the organisation is experiencing tremendous change.
- Note that, during implementation of the plan, the progress of the implementation should be reviewed at least on a quarterly basis by the board. Again, the frequency of review depends on the extent of the rate of change in and around the organisation.

