



THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

A strategic plan is a tool that provides your organization with guidance in fulfilling your mission with maximum efficiency and impact. If it is to be effective and useful, the strategic plan should articulate your organization's specific goals, describe the action steps that you will take to reach those goals, and set forth the resources you will need.

The strategic planning process allows your organization to build commitment among key stakeholders and provides a road map for organizational direction. As a rule, most strategic plans are reviewed and updated every three to five years. The task of developing a strategic plan may seem a bit overwhelming; however, by adopting a step-by-step approach and using basic assessment and planning tools, your organization can create an effective strategic plan to help you reach your organizational goals.

There are many ways to get started. One way is by using a ten-step approach that was designed by BoardSource, a national organization dedicated to building effective nonprofit organizations.

Strategic Planning in Ten Steps

Who are we?

1. Start by developing or updating your organization's vision and mission. How do you see your organization and what would you like to accomplish?

Where are we now?

2. Analyze your current strategic plan, if one exists, and analyze the performance of your organization in the key areas of program, finances and administration.
3. Assess and document the needs of children, youth, and families in your state.

4. Engage in a SWOT analysis by assessing your organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). Also, assess resources, both internally and externally – all factors that will affect your organization and influence planning. Read on to learn more about SWOT.

Where do we want to go?

5. Prepare preliminary goals and objectives, based on the information gathered and assessed in steps 1-4. If necessary, revisit and reaffirm your organization's vision and mission in light of changing times.
6. Review and decide on your organization's goals and objectives.

How will we get there?

7. Develop a financial plan and budget to support your organization's goals and objectives. What will it cost to engage in the activities necessary to reach your organization's goals and where will the funding come from?
8. Develop the action steps and strategy your organization will use to achieve each objective. This involves breaking down and identifying all of the activities that will go into achieving each of your organization's objectives.
9. Prepare a comprehensive strategic plan for review, approval, and implementation.

How are we doing?

10. Evaluate progress and update the plan on a regular basis.

Strategic planning can help your organization to think more strategically. It is also an important way for your organization's board, leadership, and staff to address tough issues, changing times, and

uncertain opportunities. Strategic thinking should be done every day, whereas strategic planning is a periodic activity. Organizations that think strategically look at the big picture and expect and plan for continuing change. Here are some of the questions that you should ask about the work that you are doing as you prepare for strategic planning:

- What are we doing well?
- What is not working well and why?
- What are the barriers to achieving our goals and objectives?
- What changes do we expect?
- Do these changes offer opportunities that support our values and mission?

There is no one right way to do strategic planning. There are a variety of planning procedures, tools and formats. Your board of directors and executive director should work together to decide on a planning process that works best for your organization. This resource offers information on steps that many organizations follow in developing a strategic plan. The following topics will be covered:

- Preparation for Strategic Planning
- Review of Organizational Mission, Vision, and Values Statements
- Organizational Assessment
- Writing Your Strategic Plan
- Effective Ways to Use Your Strategic Plan
- Statewide Family Network (SFN) Grantees Share Successful Approaches to Strategic Planning
- Helpful Resources on Strategic Planning

Preparation for Strategic Planning

The strategic planning process provides an opportunity for your organization to evaluate past performance and future direction. It also provides an opportunity for the board and key staff to strengthen their commitment to the work of the organization. This section covers some important issues to think about before beginning the strategic planning process.

Pointers

- Boards are responsible for establishing the organization's direction.
- A good plan helps board members to make a strong case for your organization with funders.
- Board members may be able to provide an objective view of your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats because they are often one step removed from the day-to-day operations.
- At the same time, it is important to have key staff involved in strategic planning because they will be involved in carrying out the plan and need to develop a real commitment to it.

What do you need to succeed in strategic planning?

- A commitment to the process from board leadership, the executive director and key staff.
- A realistic and organized plan for developing the strategic plan.
- A timetable that allows for information gathering, reflection and discussion, but is short enough to hold everyone's attention and interest (months, rather than years).
- A commitment of time and financial resources to the process.

Practical Matters

The following questions should be asked as you approach strategic planning:

- What kind of organizational assessment should be done in preparation for strategic planning?
- Who will lead the strategic planning process? Do we need to hire an outside facilitator?
- What time frame will the strategic plan cover?
- Who will be involved? Board members, the executive director, key staff and others?
- What is the budget for the assessment and planning process?

- What do we expect from the process?
- How will we use the resulting strategic plan?

Here are some additional questions that the strategic planning process should help you to answer.

Twenty Questions for Strategic Planning

1. Does our organization need to exist?
2. If so, why?
3. What is our image?
4. What would we like our image to be?
5. What impact have we had?
6. What impact would we like to have?
7. Whom do we serve?
8. What are the needs of our constituents?
9. What do we do?
10. What programs are going to be obsolete?
11. What programs need to be added?
12. How well do we discontinue programs?
13. What are our strengths?
14. What are our weaknesses?
15. What are the threats facing us?
16. What are our opportunities?
17. What trends are taking place that will affect us?
18. Who is our competition?
19. What is our strategic advantage?
20. What is the vision for our organization?

Review of the Organizational Mission, Vision, and Values Statements

The Mission Statement

The mission statement is a short declaration of your organization's purpose and should help your organization to establish boundaries. It can provide

direction when you need to adapt to new demands. It allows you to continually ask whether a course of action or a new opportunity fits within your mission. A powerful mission statement can attract donors, volunteers, and community involvement and support.

Your mission statement is an important part of your strategic plan. Potential board members, funders, and donors can use it to show that the purpose of your organization is consistent with their beliefs, values, and interests.

The Vision Statement

Your organization's vision statement describes where your organization is going. Several organizations may share a similar vision, though they may have different missions. The vision statement outlines what the organization wants to be. It is both idealistic and realistic to challenge those involved to make progress toward the organization's goals and objectives.

Organizational Values

Your organizational values are a set of beliefs shared by those involved with your work. Values drive an organization's culture and priorities and provide a framework in which to make decisions. They help to set boundaries on what you will and will not do so that even if an activity seems like a good idea for economic or political reasons, you may choose not to pursue it because it is inconsistent with your organizational values.

Organizational Assessment

There are various ways to assess your organization. This can be done through self-assessment and by seeking feedback from the broader community you serve. Here are some general questions that you may wish to ask in assessing your organization in preparation for strategic planning:

- How are we viewed by the children, youth and families that we serve?
- How effective are our staff, volunteers, and board members in their respective roles?
- How are we viewed by existing and potential funders?

- How are we viewed by existing, prospective, and previous donors?
- What motivates people to support our organization?
- Are we spending our funding on effective activities that benefit children, youth, and families?
- Is our technology up to date and serving our organization well?
- Do we need the help of outside experts?

Two commonly used methods for assessing and analyzing your organization are the 360-Degree Organizational Assessment and the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Assessment.

The 360 Degree Organizational Assessment

The 360-degree organizational assessment involves getting feedback about how your organization is doing from multiple stakeholders and perspectives. The "360" refers to the 360 degrees in a circle, with your organization figuratively in the center of the circle. Colleague organizations, individuals and families, and other key stakeholders who work with your organization are asked to provide feedback. Organizations often use a third-party to conduct the "360" assessment to help ensure that stakeholders share objective feedback. The following are three ways in which you can seek information about your organization in a "360" assessment:

- Ask a third-party to conduct confidential interviews with stakeholders;
- Use an anonymous survey that asks questions about your organization's strengths and areas for improvement (Survey Monkey offers free online surveys for this purpose); and
- Use focus groups to ask for input on your organization.

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Assessment

This starts with an *internal* look at your organization. **Strengths** are areas in which your organization excels, which might include having a dedicated and involved board of directors, strong staff and generous volunteers, multiple effective

programs, and diversified funding. **Weaknesses** are those areas that need work. It is important to be honest in assessing your organization to help ensure that the strategic plan you develop truly addresses the needs of your organization.

Looking at opportunities and threats involves an *external* look at factors that exist in your environment. **Opportunities** are things that you might capitalize on and take advantage of, such as a recent community event that results in a public outcry and a call for change, learning about a foundation or corporation interested in children's mental health, or recently enacted legislation that supports funding for family support. **Threats** are things that negatively impact your organization and can stop you in your tracks, such as major funding cuts, an economic recession that makes fundraising difficult, a non-committed board of directors, or the loss of key staff and volunteers.

The SWOT Matrix

After you have established your organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats it is helpful to place them into a matrix to assess the needs of your organization. You may wish to have staff draft the SWOT matrix and then have it reviewed by the strategic planning committee. Table 1 on page 5 helps you to see what factors need to be addressed and to strategize on how that might be done.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Tactics

Before turning to the content most often included in a strategic plan, it is important to understand the terms commonly used in strategic planning. Figure 1. on page 5 includes those terms and concepts.

Writing Your Strategic Plan

Once you complete the organizational self-assessment, it is time to turn to the strategic planning process. There are many ways to approach this. The sample strategic plan outline on page 6 is designed to give you an idea of the items commonly included in a strategic plan. Although this will give you a sense of what should be included, it is important that you develop a strategic plan that meets the unique needs of your organization.

Table 1. SWOT Matrix: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	These are the easy things to think about, and a good place to acknowledge success. What does this intersection tell you about your strategies and tactics?	What do you need to change to strengthen your organization to take advantage of these opportunities? What does this intersection tell you about your strategies and tactics? Can you do some things differently?
Threats	This is a place to prove your mettle: plan accordingly – think about your strategy and what tactics will work best in the face of these threats. How can you best deploy resources to build on your strengths to address these threats?	DANGER! You are weak here and the external environment threatens you. You need to do something about this... but what? Think about what you need to change to make your organization less vulnerable.

Figure 1. Understanding Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Tactics

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Goals: broad and global overall results that your organization seeks to achieve. For example, they might include supporting children and youth with mental health conditions and their families and/or providing a voice for children and families related to mental health services and supports in the state. Tip: Make the goals challenging, but realistic.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objectives: these are slightly narrower than goals and are the measurable results that your organization will achieve to reach its goals. These are concrete, can be tracked, and have a timeline associated with them. Your organization’s objectives might include creating support programs to assist families in Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategies: a plan of action that describes what you will do to fulfill an objective and when you will do it. For example, a strategy to develop programs to assist families in IEP meetings might include seeking funding from the Department of Education to develop and operate the program and would identify this as an activity that will be done in the first quarter of the year. Tip: In developing strategies, think about the financial resources, staffing, and volunteers you have available to take on these strategies. Also, commit to a time frame during which you will pursue these strategies so that you can measure your progress.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tactics: action steps you will take to implement strategies. Concrete things you will “do” as part of your strategy. Remember to establish a timeline with deadlines for each of the tactics and to make staff assignments for each. For example, you might assign a staff member to contact the Department of Education to set up a meeting to discuss funding to develop and operate a program to assist families in IEP meetings and set a deadline to complete this. Tip: Be sure that once your strategic plan is implemented that someone within your organization is assigned the task of keeping track of your progress in following tactics to meet your strategies, objectives, and ultimately to reach your organizational goals.

Strategic Plan for Statewide Family Network Grantee

- I. Mission Statement
- II. Vision Statement
- III. Organizational Values
- IV. Goals (list **all** goals)
- V. Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Tactics (itemized list)
 - a. Goal #1...
 - b. Objective #1 to meet Goal #1
 - i. Strategy (method) #1...
 - a.) Tactic (action step) #1...
 - b.) Tactic #2...
 - c. Evidence of Progress:
 - d. Objective #2 to meet Goal #1
 - i. Strategy (method) #1...
 - a.) Tactic (action step) #1...
 - b.) Tactic #2...
 - e. Evidence of Progress:
 - f. Goal #2...
 - g. Objective #1 to meet Goal #2
 - i. Strategy #1...
 - a.) Tactic #1...
 - b.) Tactic #2...
 - h. Evidence of Progress:
- VI. Timeline for the strategic plan (how long will it run?)
- VII. Appendices for the strategic plan (items you might wish to include)
 - a. Background
 - i. Describe why you chose to develop a strategic plan; and
 - ii. Describe the planning process used.
 - b. Identify the Planning Committee members
 - c. Include the SWOT Matrix analysis
 - d. Include other information and resources important to the planning process

SMART Action Planning

In developing strategic plans, organizations should consider using the “SMART” approach to planning. This can help you to develop an effective strategic plan and to evaluate the plan. Here are the elements for SMART planning that your organization should consider:

- **Specific:** what you will do, rather than having wish lists or vague statements;
- **Measurable:** how you will know if what you are doing is effective;
- **Attainable:** whether you have the resources to do what is in the plan;
- **Relevant:** ask if elements of the plan are important to your overall mission; and
- **Timely:** be clear about when exactly things will be done.

A word about the importance of evaluation – a strategic plan, like a road map, is only as good as your ability to follow it and to know if it has gotten you to where you want to go. Setting measurable objectives helps make this assessment easier. Score your organization on quantifiable deliverables by asking questions such as the following:

- Did we meet all of our objectives and goals?
- If not, why not? How can we improve on our performance?
- Did we do so within the time frame we set?
- If not, why not? How can we improve our ability to meet our deadlines?
- What might have been done differently to help us reach our goals and objectives?

Effective Ways to Use Your Strategic Plan

Your strategic plan is both an internal road map to guide your organization and an external marketing tool. A strategic plan developed from a comprehensive assessment is an excellent tool to use in highlighting and marketing the value of your organization to your state and communities.

Funders are most often interested in supporting outcomes, not just outputs. By making your work S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, attainable,

relevant, and timely), you can show funders and the community that your organization is committed to positive change. A professional and polished strategic plan sends a positive message about your organization to potential funders.

You should consider sharing your strategic plan with existing and potential funders, major donors, and other influential community members. It should be posted on your website and downloadable for anyone who is interested in learning more about the work of your organization.

SFN Grantees Share Successful Approaches to Strategic Planning

Two Statewide Family Network grantees shared information about their experiences with strategic planning, each responding to three questions about their recent experience in strategic planning. Jane Walker, the Executive Director of the Maryland Coalition of Families for Children's Mental Health (MD SFN Grantee) and Cathy Ciano, the Executive Director of the Parent Support Network of Rhode Island (RI SFN Grantee) shared the following valuable information.

Question #1: In recently developing a strategic plan for your organization, what was the single most important thing that your organization did to prepare for the process?

RI SFN Grantee: The single most important thing we did to prepare for strategic planning was to involve our staff in addition to our board of directors. Historically, we have only involved the executive director and board in our strategic planning process. The strategic plan really belongs to the organization so having the involvement of the staff from step one is critical for them to feel genuine ownership of the plan, and the activities associated with each goal. We held a full day strategic planning retreat.

MD SFN Grantee: The board felt that input from key stakeholders was essential before beginning the planning process. An online survey was sent to 53 stakeholders including: board members, staff members, local management boards, core service agencies, State agencies, the University of Maryland Innovations Institute and Center for

School Mental Health, Care Management entities, advocates, family organizations, and residential treatment centers. Forty-four surveys were completed. Results of the survey were compiled prior to the strategic planning process. This feedback from stakeholders was valuable in guiding the goals and strategies for the plan.

Question #2: Did your organization engage in a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) assessment, or some other form of assessment, as part of your planning process?

RI SFN Grantee: Yes, we did engage in a SWOT analysis. We had three groups participate – the staff, the board and a group of families who have been directly impacted by Parent Support Network. We hired a seasoned consultant to facilitate this process. She was very skilled at pulling out trends and themes from the assessment that helped with identifying the overarching goals of our strategic plan. Our three goals are leveraging experiential knowledge, diversifying funding, and establishing meaningful partnerships.

MD SFN Grantee: I drafted a SWOT that was then reviewed by the strategic planning committee to add, reword, or delete (nothing was actually deleted). This draft made the process faster so the Strategic Planning Committee could move on to develop goals and strategies. Strategic planning committees often spend more time reflecting backwards instead of thinking forward.

Question #3: Please provide examples of how your organization is using your strategic plan.

RI SFN Grantee: We are at the point of reviewing our strategic planning document. Although we all agreed on the three overarching goals, the plan itself is very lengthy (too lengthy) and we want to ensure that we are sharing the vision and the work reflected in the plan. We have held our first meeting with staff and board to review the plan and give feedback regarding clarity, timelines, responsibilities, and more. We will not begin the implementation of the activities in the plan until the beginning of our new fiscal year, which begins in July. As I review the plan, it is clear that sustainability is a theme that everyone is

concerned about. This comes across clearly in how the strategies/activities are identified.

MD SFN Grantee: First, we developed a staffing plan to look at our existing staff and project staffing needs based on caseload and regions. As a result of the staffing plan, the board approved a pilot to hire 5 new family members as contractors to serve regions of the state where we may not have an office. We will monitor this for the next six months to determine whether this staffing model is sustainable and effective.

Also, the board revitalized the nominating committee and charged them with identifying, screening, and orienting new board members based on the needs of the organization.

Another issue we identified in the strategic plan was regionalization, and two main regions, Baltimore City and the Eastern Shore, are working to establish local advisory councils and develop local advocacy efforts.

In addition, Maryland Coalition of Families is working closely with the Mental Hygiene Administration (the State Mental Health Authority) on development of the 1915(i) Medicaid waiver that will be submitted to the Federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in January. Specifically, we are working on the definition of services, including family-to-family support and the reimbursement rate for services.

Summary

A strategic plan is an essential tool for statewide family network grantees. The process of developing a strategic plan provides you with the

opportunity to look critically at your organization and to evaluate your mission, vision, values, goals, and the direction in which you want to take the organization. A strategic plan provides you with a tool that not only charts your organization's future, but also shines a spotlight on the valuable work that you do in your state on behalf of children, youth, and families.

Resources

Ten Keys to Successful Strategic Planning for Nonprofit and Foundation Leaders by Richard A. Mittenhal http://www.tccgrp.com/pdfs/per_brief_tenkeys.pdf

Good to Great, a website by Jim Collins that includes many useful resources for nonprofit leaders on strategic planning: <http://www.jimcollins.com/>
<http://www.jimcollins.com/tools/diagnostic-tool.pdf>

Board Source includes many resources that help nonprofits increase their effectiveness. A search on this website with the terms "strategic planning" brings up many resources for nonprofit leaders: <http://www.boardsource.org/>

The National Council of Nonprofits includes a number of resources on their website related to strategic and business planning for nonprofit leaders: <http://www.councilofnonprofits.org/strategic-business-planning-for-nonprofits>

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