



Strategic Planning: Assessment Phase

Who should be involved?

Strategy is the work of a group of people. Typically, strategic planning has been accomplished by a select group of board members and managers, yet all of the people involved in the organization are expected to feel inspired by and implement a plan they did not help create. This is not to say every single person in your organization needs to help construct the strategic plan, but stakeholders should feel their opinions and input are valued and there should be a wide range of stakeholder representatives involved in different areas of the strategic planning process, particularly the assessment phase.

For refugee-serving organizations, these should include:

- Board members
- Managers, program staff, and other office staff
- Volunteers
- Clients and other target community members
- VOLAGs, MAAs, other agencies serving refugees
- Community supporters or service providers
- Funders/potential funders
- Local government
- State Refugee Coordinator

How do you involve all of these individuals?

Conduct surveys, interviews, and or focus groups with internal and external stakeholders.

From board and staff members find out:

- Community needs
- Perceptions of quality of programs
- Program data & evaluation
- Program priorities
- Administrative and financial capacity (do amended organizational assessment)
- Time & effort commitment levels
- Donation commitment levels
- Ideas for improving communication, teamwork, and capacity

Visioning Exercise

Have staff and board members answer the following questions individually or in a small group:

1. Describe one challenge or issue your organization faces.
2. What is the desired result from dealing with this challenge/issue?
3. Why is addressing it so important?
4. How would your answer to number 3 be different if you were the one affected by this effort (e.g. Client)?
5. Imagine it is 3 years from now and your challenge/issue has been successfully addressed. What is happening? What does it look like? What has been accomplished? How has it advanced your mission? What was the fundamental change that needed to occur to make it successful?
6. Finally, use the answers to these questions to draft a purpose statement. You can also create a visual or symbol that represents this.

From external stakeholders find out their impression of your organization and:

- From target community: priority needs, services they'd like to see and where/when, potential for membership or volunteering
- Potential funders (all levels), and local nonprofit support associations: plans for future funding for which you would be eligible; needs in your community & gaps
- Other ECBOs: lessons learned
- State refugee office/ORR: refugee trends for your community; needs & gaps; vision
- Government officials: perception of your community and org; of needs of your community; what they are doing for your community; their perception of gaps and what they'd like to see you do; programs available; economic forecast; funding & partnership potential
- Other non-profits and social service agencies: programs available to your community (to find gap or partnership potentials); ECBOs and your community; needs & service gaps
- Mapping: research and list services; donors; partners
- Have all levels of staff join the board in a visioning exercise for the organization

Not all of these individuals have to be involved in the same way. For example, a good mix of all individuals listed above should be represented during the information gathering and the visioning phases of strategic planning, but clients and other organizations would not take place in formulating a road map for a strategic plan.

Trend Analysis

You will also need to determine factors out of your control that should be considered when creating strategy. If you are trying to plan for the future, you must be informed of the trends that are happening around you and evaluate how these trends could possibly affect your work and the resources that your work depends on to be successful and sustainable. Trends to look at involve local to global areas in politics, economics, culture, technology, etc. For example, as mentioned above, you may want to be made aware of certain funding trends that could open an opportunity for your organization or could hurt the likelihood of a programmatic strategy being funded. This is important to know before you spend time adding the program to your plan or omit it when it could be valuable. You also want to know refugee resettlement plans for your community, economic trends, city development plans, leadership and crime trends, etc. So in addition to the surveys or interviews above, you will also want to do online or other research into these trends.

Trends in the news can be particularly impactful to your work with ethnic communities. Often times the media will distort images of immigrants in a negative way so it is important to be aware of who is being mentioned in the media and how they are being portrayed. You can avoid any negative affects these trends have by noticing them early and putting programs and strategies in place that paint a different picture.

Benefits of using trend analysis:

- Better knowledge of external environment and greater understanding of its potential impact on organization
- Greater sense of control over organization
- Identification of trends before they are “old news”
- Improved decision-making capacity
- Identification of actions to reduce negative and increase positive impact
- Aids in reframing your position, programs, services

Activity:

Begin by involving staff and board members in research using a trend analysis worksheet that lists the following categories: Type of trend, direction of trend (increasing, decreasing or staying about the same), and comments. This research can be based on staff knowledge, interviews or extended to research in news publications, studies, public documents, etc. Trend analysis should be an ongoing process and the results can be briefly discussed at staff and board meetings, as well as analyzed for strategic planning.

Planning Committee

Even though many people should be included throughout the entire strategic planning process, there should be a committee to help guide the process. This committee should include:

- the executive director
- the board chair
- those who will be involved in composing the plan
- at least one person who can provide administrative duties such as organizing meetings and facilitating activities that involve the group and flipcharts.

You may want to assign each member a specific duty, such as facilitating surveys or reviewing the plan document.

** Remember, a primary responsibility of the board is to aid in the strategic planning process, because this helps effectively run the organization. All board members should be involved in some capacity of the planning process and especially during the visioning/finding direction (mission, vision, values) phase.

Conclusion

Strategy needs to be inclusive of all the different needs of stakeholders in the organization, while guided by a planning committee. Not everyone's opinions or ideas need to be implemented, but everyone should feel they were represented and valued during the process. When strategic planning is completed using all the different people mentioned in this tip sheet, you will have a stronger more realistic strategic plan that everyone will feel inspired to carry out effectively.

The next tip sheet in this series will describe further steps in the strategic planning process.

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