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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT GUIDE

STRATEGIC PLANNING

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Strategic Planning

Introduction

You're probably a strategic planning veteran and don't even know it. Think about it: family vacations, retirement funds, sending your children or yourself to college, these are all examples of events that required some degree of long-term planning. And that's exactly the essence of strategic planning: a long-term, usually multi-year, roadmap comprised of a set of goals and objectives that help you successfully move forward from where you are now to where you want to be.

A strategic plan is founded on a vision and continues long after the initial groundwork is set. It's a common sense tool that sets a clear path for the future, while also allowing for your vision to mature and change as time passes.

Strategic planning is also a preventative measure designed to assist you in achieving maximum effectiveness and equity before a program or department reaches crisis level. Or, in management terms, strategic planning is "proactive," instead of "reactive." Semantics aside, strategic planning translates into good, common sense.

You may be following all the principals but not formalizing your plans in a structured format for all to see and follow. By formalizing a plan and having input from the participants and stakeholders, you are more apt to get buy in from all concerned. In this manner, a strategic plan is more apt to be successful. To help you and your municipality better understand the mechanics of strategic planning, we offer a fictional account of a municipality involved in the strategic planning process on pages 3-6. We take you through each phase of the strategic plan and explain why certain choices were made and what steps the planners should take at various points along the way. It is our goal, that after reading the sample strategic plans, you will realize that applying the strategic planning process to your particular municipal project will assist in its successful completion.

With these in mind, it's time to take your strategic planning expertise to your locality.

Overview

Strategic planning is more than just good business, it's good practice. If done correctly, it has the power to transform today's visions into tomorrow's realities. But what exactly is it? Strategic planning helps your local government realize its long-term vision by setting up goals and objectives in a systematic, incremental manner. Simply put, it makes you take a look at what's going on today, where you want to be tomorrow and which steps you will need to take to get there.

While strategic planning is a valuable tool that assists all sizes of government plan for the future, it must be emphasized that the process is only as strong as its advocates. Specifically, strategic planning may only succeed if it has the *unequivocal support of the chief executive, legislative body and affected department heads.*

To garner top-level support, hold a meeting or brainstorming session that allows executives and department heads to ask questions, make suggestions and discuss their concerns. By bringing these issues to the table, you can show how each item may be enhanced or better served through strategic planning.

We have divided this module into two distinct, but complimentary, parts. The first section gives you a more theoretical explanation of what strategic planning is. It helps you gauge whether your municipality is ready to undertake a project of this nature by illustrating basic principles and concepts. The next section is a "How-To" guide that takes the theory and puts it into practice. This particular part has been designed specifically for municipal officials who want to be able to implement strategic planning, but have little to no prior experience.

Another facet of the "How-To" section is to provide you with actual forms that your local government may use if it decides to engage in strategic planning. We have also broken down each chapter within this section so that you and your colleagues can easily reference what you have accomplished, as well as what lies ahead. We created this to be a practical guide that serves as the roadmap for your strategic planning efforts.

On the next few pages is a brief example of the strategic planning process that illustrates which key elements are needed for implementation and offers you a guide to follow in your own locality.

Our goal in creating this module is to provide you with another tool that will assist you in your daily and long-term municipal operations.

We have designed this publication for both elected and appointed local officials who are interested in strategic planning. This guide assumes no prior knowledge of strategic planning and takes a very basic approach to the rudiments involved in creating and implementing such a strategic plan.

This publication aims to convey the following:

- Description of strategic planning: what it is, key terms and concepts
- Why strategic planning is beneficial
- How to apply this technique
- Who should be involved, and at which stages
- Offer a "how-to" guide that takes you from inception to implementation

The Office of the State Comptroller advocates strategic planning as another tool to preserve your municipality's fiscal health and overall well-being. By taking a look at the past and present, we believe that you will be better equipped to craft your own future.

Throughout this chapter, we will further explore the benefits and challenges to implementing strategic planning. Our goal in creating it is to offer you another tool that can assist you with both your daily, as well as long-term, duties. We believe that you will find this guide to be accessible, and we encourage you to adapt these basic principles in a manner that will help you and your locality effectively carry out its mission.

Strategic Planning has also been designed to compliment other chapters of this guide. For example, Financial Condition discusses capital planning, another type of long-range planning that is built upon forward-looking principles and procedures. Other good resources include Annual Budgets, Multi-Year Capital Plans, Reserves and Debt Management.

Sample Strategic Plan Key Elements

The fictitious scenario below takes you through the Strategic Planning process and offers examples and organizational techniques for you to follow.

Background: The City of Townville, population 70,000, has experienced a crime wave over the past year. Loitering, graffiti, stolen property and other minor, but nevertheless, illegal acts have been reported. Understandably, everyone wants to eliminate crime, but since Townville is a small city, there are only so many police officers. In the meantime, the Mayor, City Council and Police Commissioner have been barraged by calls from concerned residents and local media regarding the current state of affairs.

As City Manager, you believe that you have a solution: community assistance. By increasing the number of people walking Townville's streets, you feel that it will help deter crime. In addition, it would heighten community involvement and build morale and trust. The citizens would work in conjunction with the police department and serve as neighborhood monitors. The question now is: how do we do this?

To get a sense if this project is right for Townville, you've had to do some homework. You've researched how other municipalities have utilized community patrols by reading articles, accessing websites and interviewing public officials who have had success with this. After investigating the legal ramifications, meeting with police personnel and union representatives, crunching numbers, taking an inventory of Townville's resources and then garnering support from the Mayor, Council and Police Commissioner, you are ready to implement the City of Townville's first Community Safety Unit. On the following page is Townville's Strategic Plan for the Police Department's Community Safety Unit from start to finish:

For (department, program or unit): Police Department's Community Safety Unit, The City of Townville

Start date: January 1 (beginning of the City of Townville's fiscal year [FY]

Mission Statement:

> *"The City of Townville's Community Safety Unit is a cooperative effort between the citizens of Townville and its Police Department that strives to keep the municipality free of illegal and unwarranted activity. The Community Safety Unit ensures equality for all persons who either live or visit our area and promotes integrity, honesty and a sense of community pride. Under the direction of the Mayor, City Council, Police Chief and a Citizen President, the Community Safety Unit and its members are charged with maintaining the high quality of life that the people of Townville so deserve."*

Values

The Community Safety Unit operates under these core beliefs:

- ***Partnership***: a safe community rests both with the government and its people. We encourage and value our residents and their contributions and seek to maintain the alliance.

- ***Equality***: equal treatment for all people is paramount. We will not tolerate discrimination toward any resident or non-resident and aim to protect the rights of all people within our boarders.

- ***Integrity***: we vow to operate in an ethical and responsible manner and execute the duties of the Community Safety Unit in the same way.

Vision Statement:

> *"The City of Townville's Community Safety Unit would like to expand its personnel and services, such as outreach and assistance, while also maintaining fiscal integrity and responsibility. We would like to increase volunteer activities and opportunities and make every member of the community aware of our presence and the many free services that we offer. Townville's Community Safety Unit seeks to achieve this vision by fiscal year 2007."*

Goals, Objectives and Strategies

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY
1. Create volunteer pool to provide more citizen safety	Establish Community Watch Foot Patrol in 60% of all districts	Initiate foot patrol coverage in 60% of all districts at end of FY
2. Offer services responsive to citizens' needs	Discontinue non-value services and replace with new-value services	Conduct customer survey and implement at least one new service by end of 2nd quarter based on customer survey
3. Increase citizen awareness of Community Safety Unit	Increase Unit's visability among citizens	Create Issue #1 of bi-annual newsletter and mail to residents by end of 2nd quarter

Action Plans

- ***Goal, Objective & Strategy 1***: a) Initiate Foot Patrol coverage to 60 percent of all City districts by the end of the fiscal year (December 31).

Strategy	By Whom	By When
Recruit and train new members	Community Safety Unit Training Division	November 1
Initiate coverage for Districts A, B and C	Strategic Planning Work Group #1	December 31 (or before)
Deploy personnel	Community Safety Unit	December 31 (or before)

(continued on following page)

- ***Goal, Objective & Strategy 2***: Discontinue outdated services and implement at least one new service by end of the second quarter (June 30).

Strategy	By Whom	By When
Create customer survey	Townville Strategic Planning Team and Community Safety Unit heads (not on Team)	End of January
Disseminate survey	All Townville residents	February 7
Compile survey results	Townville Strategic Planning Work Group #2	March 15
Present findings to Mayor, City Council, Community Safety Unit, public and media	Strategic Planning Team Leader (e.g., CFO)	April 1 (at regularly scheduled council meeting)
Agree upon which outdated services should be discontinued; create new programs	Townville Strategic Planning Team and Community Safety Unit heads (not on Team)	May 1
Publicize new services	Townville Strategic Planning Work group #2	June 30
Implement new service(s)	Community Safety Unit	July 1

- ***Goal, Objective & Strategy 3:*** Increase community awareness and visibility by creating Issue #1 of bi-annual newsletter by the end of second quarter (June 30).

Strategy	By Whom	By When
Create Customer survey to gauge degree of awareness	Townville Strategic Planning Team and Community Safety Unit heads (not on team)	End of January
Disseminate survey	All Townwide residents	February 7 (send with, or on, CSU services survey)
Compile results and draft a 2-page self-mailing newsletter (Issue #1)	Townville Strategic Planning Work group #3 and City Public Information Office	April 15
Review Issue #1	Townville Strategic Planning Team and Community Safety Unit heads (not on team)	May 15
Edit and print Issue #1	Townville Strategic Planning Work group #3 and City Public Information Office	June 15
Disseminate Issue #1	Townville Strategic Planning Work group #3 and City Public Information Office	June 30

Monitoring

From this point on, you should be **monitoring progress** and **making course corrections,** if necessary. If you are meeting your targets and deadlines, chances are you will have little difficulty meeting your initial objectives.

Part 1

Strategic Planning: What is it?

Is Strategic Planning for Us?

Why Do We Need a Strategic Plan?

Inevitably you will have to answer, “Why do we need a strategic plan?” to yourself, your colleagues, elected officials or possibly the public. Some may see it as yet another soon-to-pass management fad, complete with trendy jargon, increased paperwork and an intensified workload. Others may see it as a challenge to their existing roles and feel that this “strategic plan,” devalues their prior contributions. While there may still be others who, no matter what you say on behalf of strategic planning, will not embrace change. The size of the government should dictate the need and degree of implementation. The final decision should be based on cost-benefit.

So, why *do* you need a strategic plan?

- ***Strategic planning yields results:*** A strategic plan provides a realistic, workable framework that is built upon a foundation of constant improvement. Built into the plan are milestones that help gauge your progress.

- ***Strategic planning is an invaluable managerial tool:*** Balancing daily and long-term operations with defined, and often limited, resources is complex. A strategic plan assists you in determining how to perform work more efficiently and effectively, while staying within financial parameters.

- ***Strategic planning is adaptable to a changing environment:*** A multi-year plan will, inevitably,be affected by the changing internal and external environments. Therefore, you need to have a framework that is flexible enough to accommodate flux, while at the same time, strong enough to adhere to your basic mission and objectives. A strategic plan has those capabilities.

- ***Strategic planning is responsive to citizens’ needs:*** A successful strategic plan includes those priorities that are important to the citizens. Because citizen input is a vital component in the process, the ability of the strategic plan to address their needs is great.

- ***Strategic planning narrows the communication gap***: Dialogue among all of the affected parties ensures a narrowing of potential communication gaps. As said, strategic planning is a participatory tool that cannot function unless there is a two-way, open exchange of ideas.

- ***Custom-tailored***: Each department or municipality has different needs and the strategic plan allows for specific objectives and parameters that are specialized and appropriate to the organization.

- ***Adaptability***: Elements contained within a strategic plan are not “carved in stone” and do not end once specific objectives and goals are put on paper.

It's an on-going process that is designed to be refined based on changing internal and external conditions.

- ***Accountability***: With government dollars shrinking and public sentiment advocating more fiscal prudence, a solid strategic plan with definite objectives, financial targets and monitoring tools in place, ensures accountability.

- ***Participatory***: A good strategic plan involves people at all levels of government, or within the department, and requires input from everyone if it is to succeed. By involving more people among the various levels, you are fostering teamwork and a sense of ownership. The strategic planning process should involve the public, as well. In fact, organizations that successfully implement this solicit input from their customers. Public forums, surveys and task forces are just a few ways that a community can involve residents. Similar to what you and your colleagues may experience, this process will also allow the public to feel a sense of ownership.

A high-quality strategic plan translates into much more than just a written outline of the future. A host of practical and subtle benefits also stem from the document. On the practical, day-to-day side, a strategic plan, by virtue of its structure, has the ability to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and decision-making. On the more subtle side, a successful strategic plan that has been crafted by a number of stakeholders has the ability to unify and empower a group to enact meaningful change.

In addition to these functional elements, a strategic plan is a tangible reflection of community spirit and culture. The goals and objectives you put on paper are representative of numerous people: staff, local officials, citizens (including taxpayers) and non-residents who may use your public service(s). It also conveys your community's values and reinforces the reciprocal partnership that government has to its citizens. In short, the strategic plan articulates those issues that are important to your community and allows a collective action plan to come to fruition.

Who to Involve

At each stage of the process, you will need to involve various people and groups. While collectively, everyone's input is needed, it is important to note that some individuals' involvement will be limited or sporadic. In terms of readiness, however, you will need to involve more top-level people at the very beginning.

In order to become "ready," you will have to organize the **"Strategic Planning Team."** A strategic planning team is the human foundation of the entire project and serves as the sponsor for the plan. Members of this team generally include:

- **Chief Executive Officer** and/or **Legislative Body** (usually the lead sponsor)
- **Fiscal Officer**
- **Legislative members** who have a vested interest
- **Key Department heads**
- **Some key stakeholders** (suggested stakeholders may include: organizations, groups, customers, vendors)

This is really the only formal "team" that you will have. As we will explain later, the others that will be involved in the strategic planning process will be assigned to "work groups." While the work groups will have sporadic involvement at various stages, they are still just as vital as the strategic planning team.

Readiness

Before you begin formulating a strategic plan, it's important to ask a few significant questions that will help in assessing your local government's degree of readiness.

Pre-flight checklist:

- √ Is there executive-level support?
- √ Is there governing board support?
- √ Are we in a favorable position to undertake strategic planning, or are we at a crisis level?
- √ Is there departmental support?
- √ Which key (department) personnel should be involved?
- √ Do we have enough resources - personnel, financial, time, technology - to create a solid strategic plan?
- √ Are we ready to involve the public?

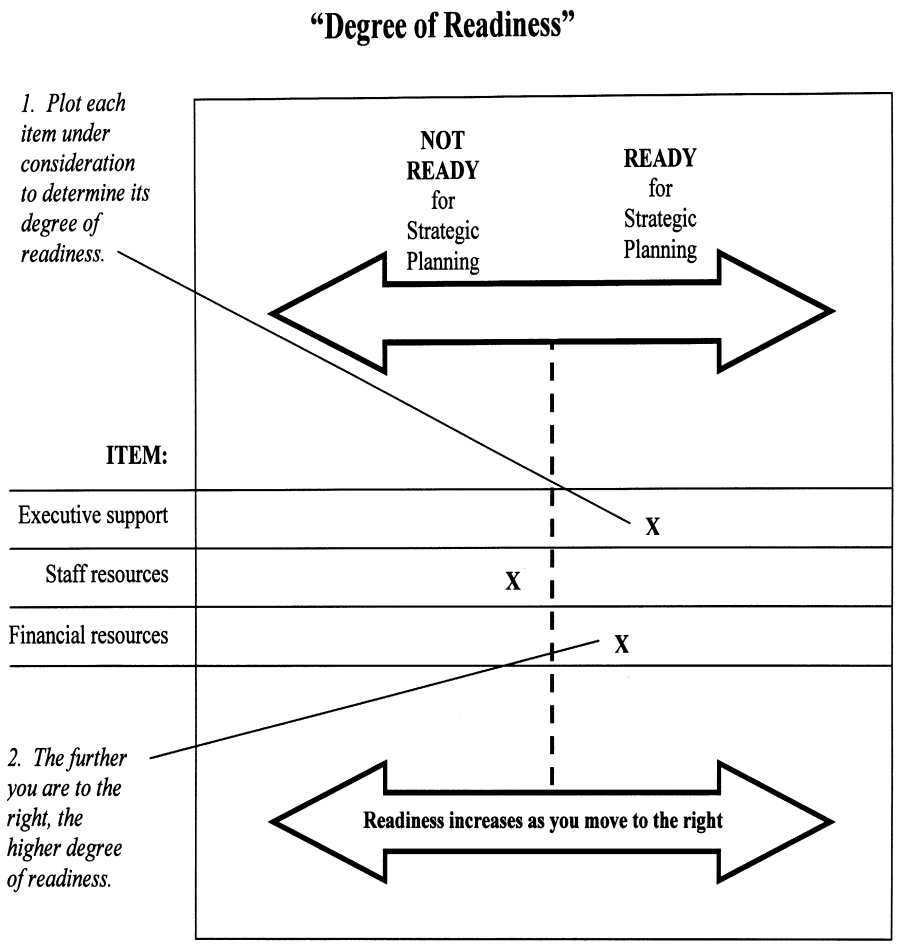
If you can answer "yes" to all of these preliminary questions, then you and your colleagues are ready to move to the next phase: crafting the strategic plan. But what if you're not? What if some gaps or other obstacles exist? Then, how do you get ready for "takeoff," so-to-speak?

When you can't check off everything on the pre-flight list, then you need to readdress the bigger question: ***Is the time right for strategic planning?*** For example, perhaps you may need more top-level support. Executive influence is a large motivator in getting the strategic planning process off the ground. If that's the case, then you may need to provide your executive and/or governing boards more background information. This provides you with a good opportunity to review your materials and make sure that there are no gaps. For additional considerations that should be addressed, see Appendix C.

Another multi-faceted question that affects a number of items on the list is: ***Are there enough resources?*** Do you have enough personnel to work on this? Is your staff capable of gathering data, analyzing it and transforming it into meaningful information, while also being able to fit in their daily duties? Have you provided them with the proper technology to complete the job? Will you compensate them for additional time? Furthermore, do you have the financial resources to do so? How much input will staff have? Are you and your top-level players willing to take staff suggestions? Support from staff who perform the operations is just as critical to achieving success.

You will also need to discuss the level of public involvement. A good strategic plan does more than just *consider* the customer, it ***involves*** the customer. It's important to recognize that the magnitude of public involvement may be best determined by the size of the project and the number of constituency groups involved. For example, implementing a municipality-wide strategic plan may not require a high degree of public involvement initially. As the strategic plan begins to take shape, then the public's input will become valuable. Conversely, a small undertaking, for example, enhancing the public library's services, may need citizen involvement from day one. Once you establish the size and scope of the project, then the level of citizen involvement may be determined.

Finally, and most importantly, you need to know where the locality or unit "is" presently. This means that **if you answer, "yes" to: *"are we at a crisis level?"* then strategic planning is not advised at this time.** Strategic planning and crisis management should not be undertaken simultaneously. In fact, strategic planning during a crisis may only intensify the original difficulties and create new administrative, financial and morale problems.



If you're not 100% ready, how do you get ready?

If, as mentioned, some of the key items on your pre-flight checklist are unchecked, then how can you get fully ready to proceed? First, **review which specific items are uncertain**. Is there top-level support, for example? If not, why? Have you done everything that you can on your end to gain this? Perhaps you need additional data and justification. What if sufficient staff resources are unavailable? The next step is to examine who is needed, who is available and consider conflicting priorities. Then, construct a tentative plan and accompanying time frame that may help determine when you will be ready. Continue this method until you have isolated each unchecked item.

Next, take a look at whether or not these items are interrelated. The essence of strategic planning is that it is designed to mirror reality; it takes a circular, integrated look at the many factors that affect the whole. Ask yourself whether or not these issues are connected. For example, perhaps you do not yet have executive support because there are not enough resources. Or, perhaps there are not enough resources because the economy is weak. Are there new governing board members who are not strategic planning advocates, and therefore top-level support is limited? Looking for the obvious and not-so-obvious relationships between the internal and external is one way to prepare for takeoff.

After you have determined the snags and have addressed them, then readdress strategic planning. Return to the executive board armed with solid answers and then put the wheels in motion for getting the strategic planning process going.

You're ready! Now what?
(A word of caution: things to avoid)

Here is a quick run down of things to avoid once you've decided to implement strategic planning:

- √ ***Starting at crisis, or near-crisis, time***: If this is the case, wait until conditions are right. Remedy the problem at hand and then revisit the strategic planning issue to avoid future crises.

- √ ***Beginning without executive and governing board support***: The lack of top-level support translates into a strategic plan with a very short life span. Studies have shown that projects with executive support had a considerably higher success rate.

- √ ***Working without sufficient resources: human capital, financial, technological*** - A strategic plan is great, but if you are unable to physically construct it based on one or more of these factors, then it is advised that you wait until you have all of the necessary resources at your disposal.

- √ ***Initiating change for the sake of change***: Don't assume that a strategic plan will jump-start a lagging program or placate an apathetic public. While change is productive, you have to be sure that your timing coincides. Do citizens want change? If so, what do they want? When do they want it? Also, be mindful of your staff's reaction. Resistance to change is common and their readiness to embrace a new way of doing business will be reflected in the process.

- √ ***Starting the process without a clear picture of the internal and external factors***: Knowing what's going on around you is vital. Internal and external situations and issues will have an impact on your municipality, regardless of whether or not you initiate a strategic plan. Therefore, it's important to have an awareness of those issues and elements that will influence how you do business.

- √ ***Having an unclear future vision***: While the strategic plan is certainly adaptable, it needs an unambiguous end vision. Participants need to know why and what they're striving for.

- √ ***Working with an outdated or non-applicable mission statement***: As times change, missions change. This is not to say that the core of why an organization exists should be abandoned. Rather, it's a good practice to review your current

mission statement, in light of the times, and see if there needs to be any revisions based on current social, economic or even technological issues. On the same token, use this opportunity to eliminate non-applicable language.

√ ***Not knowing what your customers and stakeholders want***: The strategic plan is designed to serve everyone. If you cannot identify what the groups want, then your plan has a very limited chance of generating productive change and achieving customer satisfaction. You need to go into the field, solicit input from customers and stakeholders (both internally and externally) as to what people desire and need.

√ ***Doing too much alone***: As we've said, strategic planning is interactive and the process should be participatory. Feel free to delegate tasks to other members based on their strengths and interests. Just because you initiated the process, does not mean that you have to shoulder the burden of making the entire project come to life. Also remember, the more you do by yourself, the more one-sided the plan becomes. In addition, too much singular effort on your part could lead to resentment and apathy among the other members.

If any of these variables are present, it is strongly advised that you **WAIT** until either the problem has been solved or until the timing is better. Remember, patience is a virtue. What you do now will have a direct effect on what happens later. Be sure that you are working within the best set of circumstances when you decide to initiate strategic planning.

Strategic Planning Fundamentals

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is a systematic process by which you identify:

- why your local government exists,
- whom it serves,
- what benefits will be derived from the services it provides, and
- the vision your administration has regarding how citizens needs can best be served.

The strategic plan is the result of this process, and serves as a blueprint for how your local government will achieve this vision.

Basic Elements of Strategic Planning:

Understanding of basic elements of strategic planning are necessary to help you understand what strategic planning is all about, and to ensure you have a successful experience employing the processes and techniques explained in this chapter.

It is important that any organization (including your local government) have a clear understanding of why it exists, who its customers are, what services it provides to them, and that its customers needs are being served. In local governments this is necessary to ensure that citizens' needs can best be served, and that local government officials develop clearly defined blueprints and implement them to ensure it happens.

- **Mission**

  Mission is the way you communicate to your customers (citizens to whom services are provided) and other stakeholders (those with a vested interest) why your local government exists, how they benefit or are impacted.

- **Vision**

  By working with and listening to citizens, your administration should acquire an understanding of what services they want from their local government and the issues that concern them. Your administration should formulate a *vision* that represents a future to aspire to that is responsive to their needs and concerns. Consequently, vision is a picture that your administration crafts today of what your local government's future will look like.

- **Goals**

  Goals are results-oriented, broad statements of policy or intention and represent particular aspects of the vision.

- **Objectives**

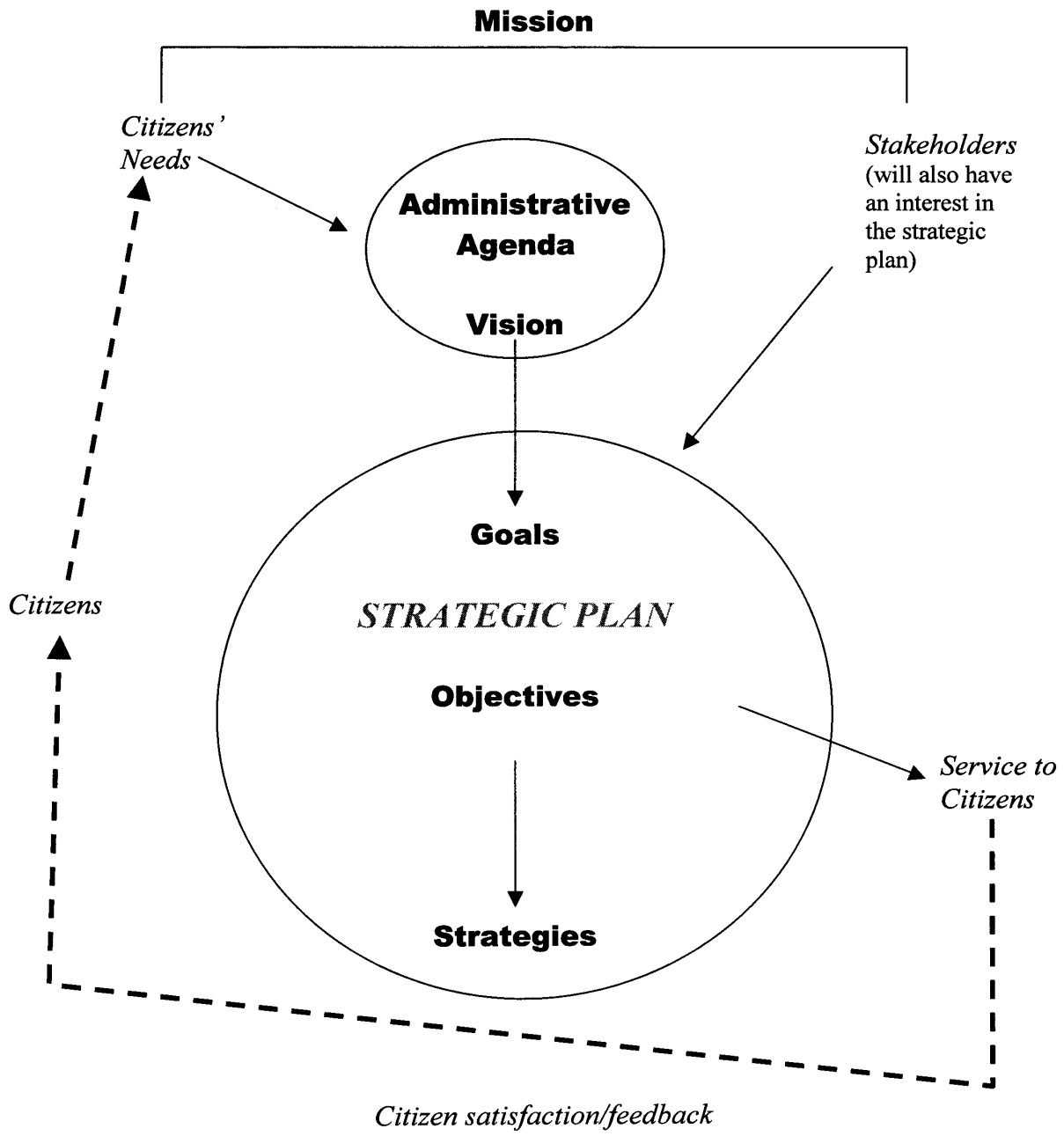
  Objectives are specific products or services that are needed to attain a goal.

- **Strategy**

  Strategies are key steps (milestones) in achieving an objective.

The relationship among these elements is shown pictorially in Figure 1 (shown on next page).

Figure 1. Basic Elements of Strategic Planning



As you can see, the needs and concerns of citizens should be the basis for the administration's agenda. The basic elements of strategic planning (mission, vision, goals, objectives and strategies) comprise the strategic plan. This plan is the way your agenda is communicated to citizens. Its implementation is the way you insure that your vision is achieved. Periodic feedback from customers is needed to assess if, in fact, the services are responsive to their needs and concerns.

To get to that end, you need to ask the following four key questions:

1. Where are we currently?
2. Where do we want to be in the future?
3. How do we get there?
4. How do we gauge progress?

These four questions are critical because they lay the groundwork for crafting the content of the strategic plan. This framework stays in place throughout the process and ensures that you stay on-track as you progress.

Within these questions is a key stipulation that, if not agreed upon, will be the silent executioner of your strategic plan; that is, the word "we." A department's strategic plan is only as strong as its advocates. Successful strategic plans have had strong management support and commitment that has ultimately filtered down to others in the organization. If this is absent, then the process becomes one uphill battle after another.

Next, because the decisions and ideals within the plan affect the local government or a significant portion of it, it's important that key staff (e.g. executive, governing board, department heads) concur with the basic idea of implementing a long-term plan. Once this premise is set, then the environment becomes conducive for beginning the process.

Finally, don't forget, the ultimate, "we": the taxpayers. Because government is accountable for what it spends and the results achieved, it is imperative that the strategic plan be comprehensive, realistic and fiscally responsible.

Part II

Strategic Planning: A How-to Guide

Getting Organized

The Strategic Planning Team

Now that you've assessed your local government's level of readiness, the next step is to create the strategic planning team and decide which people or groups should be represented. From the inception, key officials that should be involved are:

- Chief Executive Officer (sponsor)
- Chief Fiscal Officer
- Governing board
- Department heads
- Key department staff (e.g. program/service managers, human resources, information technology)
- Municipal counsel
- Stakeholders (as appropriate)

*****Tool #1: "Teams"*** *(Please see Appendix B, which provides useful guidance in organizing and managing a team.)*

After the strategic planning team is established, other levels of participants, both internally and externally, should be involved as needed. Such people or groups may include:

- Department staff (practitioners, analysts, administrative)
- Affected parties that do not work directly for the department or unit, but are important to the organization's operations
- Stakeholders
- Citizens/customers
- Other groups or parties specific to your municipality that you feel will enhance the strategic planning process

Organizing the Planning Effort

Once you have isolated the types of people you want to be involved, then you should ask the following questions:

- How many staff should be involved?
- How much public involvement do we want?
- Does everyone realize that this is a long-term effort?

Finally, inclusion is another important part of the process. While some may argue that the more people you let into the circle, the more dissention and indecision you'll get, strategic planning advocates will tell you the opposite. Experience has proven that the more people you include, the more rich and all-encompassing the final product will be. The art to this is to invite people to join at different stages, as suggested above. The recipe is simple: first, garner top-level support. Next, involve stakeholders and customers. Involve customers by conducting one or more focus groups or a customer satisfaction survey. Involve staff through one or more work groups (e.g. internal assessment working group) and solicit input from them. Then, include anyone else that you think will make the process and product more rounded, and at the end, be sure to alert the media (if they are not already apprised and/or involved).

Strategic Planning Process

Agree on a Process

The strategic planning team's first order of business should be to agree upon a process that will guide the entire project. The decisions that the team will need to make clear, should address such procedural issues as: decision-making, level of others' involvement, communication and timelines. These all should be in place before you write the strategic plan.

How will the vision, goals, objectives and action plans be decided upon? Will the executive branch determine them? Will the participants decide? Also, how will you go about reaching consensus once the few remaining possibilities are on the table? Will you vote? If so, how? Ballot? Show of hands?

Will you be creating progress reports? Will individual people or teams be writing them? If so, how often? How will you communicate progress? Will you have work groups disseminate progress reports? Will you have a web page? When will subsequent meetings take place? When and how will you monitor?

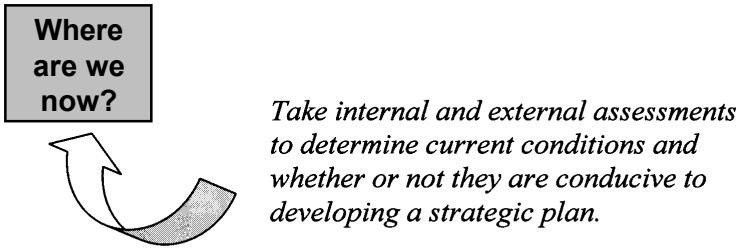
Finally, how will you report your progress? Will you create and send out a newsletter? Will you use electronic and print media such as the Internet, newspaper and public

service announcements? Is there a specific person or team that will have regular contact with local media? Who fields which questions? Executive? Department heads?

As you can see, the more of the details that you and your colleagues can hammer out prior to constructing the strategic plan, the fewer headaches and confusion you'll have. Clarity is an often overlooked facet that, when present, can propel any project to success.

Recommended Process

Remember the five key questions? Well, now it's time to answer them. As you proceed to each question, you will be faced with a series of secondary questions that stem from each initial inquiry. Also, since strategic planning is customized, you may find additional issues that are specific to your municipality or department that fall within these five main questions. Be sure to bring them to everyone's attention and consider them just as seriously. Below are listed the initial questions, as well as their resulting counterparts.

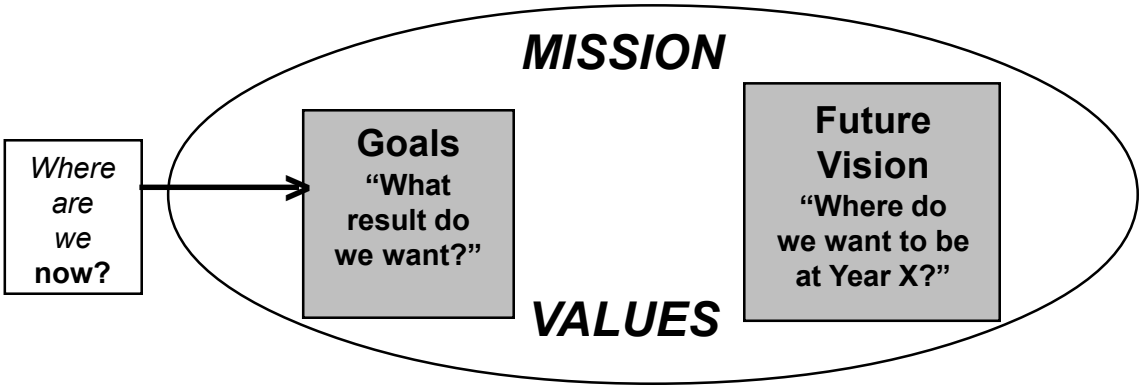


Assessments may be accomplished by conducting a type of analysis that looks at Strengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats (SWOT) that could affect your organization. Please see Tool #6, Appendix B, for more detail on the SWOT Analysis.

> ***Internal assessment*:** Complete an "environmental scan," a procedure that helps you take inventory of your organization's present operations and mandates so that you may have an accurate picture of what services your government currently provides and to whom they are provided. Who are our stakeholders? What are their needs? Have we met them adequately in the past? If so, how can we build upon this? If not, how can we improve? What are their thoughts? A list of considerations for an internal assessment is shown in Appendix C.
>
> ***External assessment*:** Who are our customers? What is important to our customers? Are we serving their needs? How well have we delivered the services we promised? Which governmental mandates are we bound by? How can we serve our customers' needs and continue to stay within financial, legal and governmental parameters?

***Mission and values*:** Why are we here? A mission statement is a written statement of purpose that describes what the organization does, and for whom. Inherent in a mission statement are an organization's values. Values articulate what is important and often serve as the cornerstone for all activities. When constructing a strategic plan, you have to be sure of what your overall mission is, and then incorporate future goals and associated objectives and strategies.

2. Where do we want to be in the future?



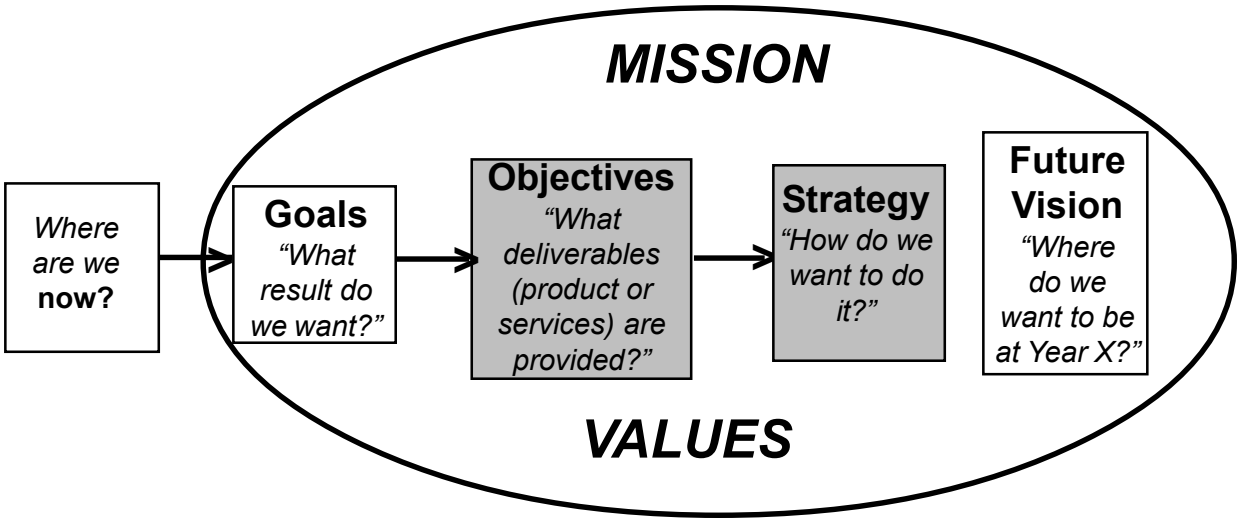
N. B. All steps must take into account your organization's goals and values.

This is the time where the **"vision,"** or description of "where we want to be" is crafted.

***Vision*:** Where do you want your organization to be in the future? A vision takes today's situation and explains what tomorrow should be like. It is generally seen as the result of implementing a strategic plan, but since good strategic plans are actually circular in nature, rather than linear, then there is no official end point. Therefore, the vision is more of one completed chapter in a text with many, rather than a definitive, closing.

The vision will help you define your **goals**. By knowing where you want to be at a certain period of time, you will be better able to design how to attain that future vision.

Goal: A goal is a broad outcome of what you want to achieve.



Objective: Once the goal(s) is set, what specific products and services will be provided?

Strategy**:** Specific targets need to be specified and translated into quantifiable data (note table below). The questions now become: where do we want to be by the end of the quarter? By the end of the fiscal year? In two years? Five years? Next, what do we want to have accomplished within these time frames?

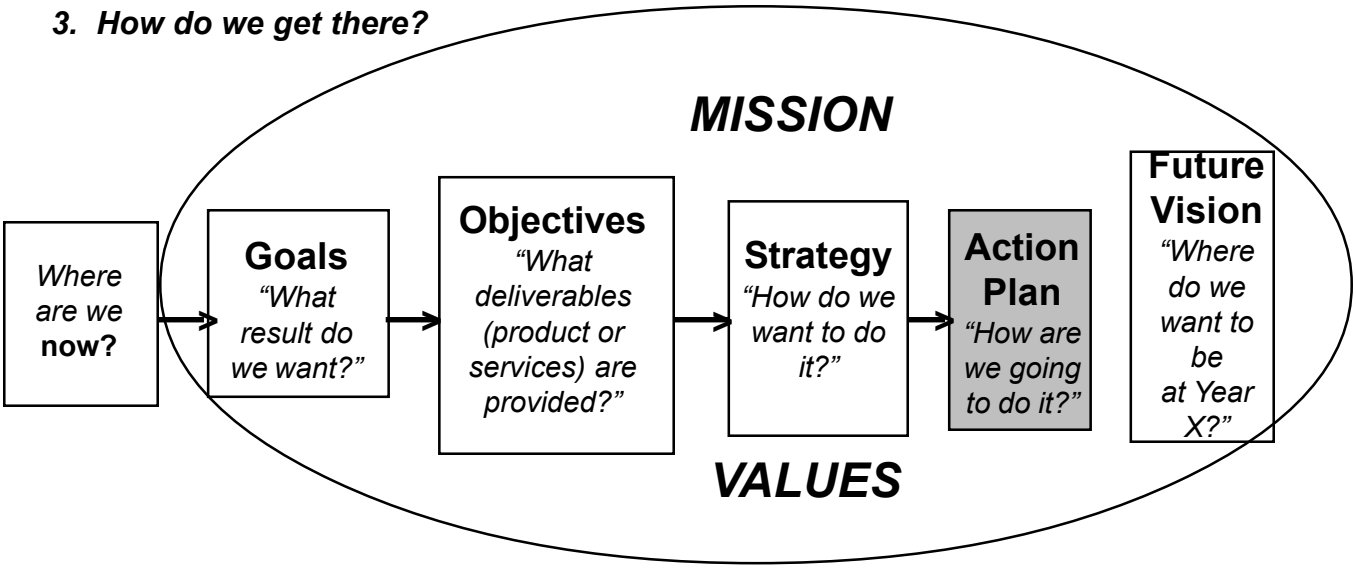
The relationship among goal, objective and strategy is illustrated by the following example:

GOAL
To make Municipal services more available to citizens

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY
Expand municipal parking lot	Increase number of parking spots by 30 by the end of the quarter

Remember: the vision, goals and objectives portions of the strategic plan may be slightly lofty at first. As you will see, reality injects itself in future sections.

3. How do we get there?



Allow all ideas on the table and empower your team to work together and design action plans. Also, in order to get the action plans in place, your work groups will have to engage in consensus building and prioritization techniques. These tools are explained further in Appendix B.

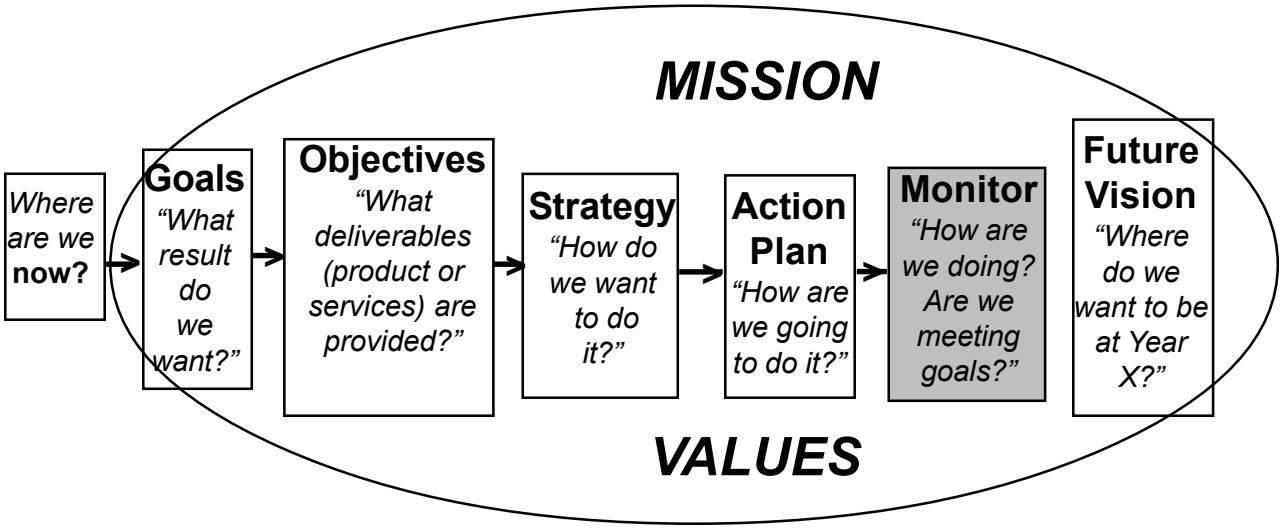
Action plans: Now that goals have been set, the next step is determining how you will achieve them. In this phase, detailed work plans, complete with short- and long-term strategies for getting from where you are now to where you want to be, are your objectives.

While creating the action plans, you will need to take a look at what is going on around you, both on an internal and external level. This is a good habit to get into, because throughout the process, you will have to assess your internal and external environments and see how they fit into your overall plan. Again, you will have to ask yourself, what are the customers' and stakeholders' needs? Will the action plans meet their single and collective needs? What are the impediments to achieving our goals? Is there top-level support for the action plans? If so, do we have the resources to implement the action plans? Are there any legal barriers or issues that must be addressed? Which departments or programs are at risk? What specific challenges will our municipality, department, unit or program face?

Finally, the most important question at this stage is: how will we get from A to B, and then to C, D and E, et cetera? How will we deal with potential pitfalls and obstacles? What is the protocol if something goes awry? Which strategic planning team member needs to be notified first? Is everybody clear about the lines of communication? This is where consensus building and prioritization takes center stage. All of these questions have to be addressed and answered before the strategic plan is drafted.

Once the aforementioned issues and questions are dealt with, then the time comes where all participants convene to develop and adopt the strategic plan. After this takes place, then you are ready to begin implementation.

4. How do we gauge progress?



Once implementation begins, you need regular and consistent oversight. Again, this is not an invitation to micromanage or to force change. Instead, seek input from customers and other stakeholders and see if intended results are being achieved.

***Monitoring and tracking*:** as mentioned, the strategic plan is an evolving document. While the core values and goals remain unchanged, the plan for bringing such designs to life requires routine oversight and, in most cases, fine-tuning. By monitoring your progress at regular intervals, you allow your plan to adapt to a changing environment, while simultaneously maintaining your original vision and core values.

How often should you monitor? Because a strategic plan is custom-made to fit your organization's needs, the timeline varies. However, a good rule of thumb is to track your progress quarterly. Of course, you are free to amend this rule, decreasing or increasing the number of times you monitor. Some experts even advocate monthly, depending upon how time sensitive your plans are. However, be aware that *too much* monitoring can be as dangerous as too little. In your effort to observe your progress, be sure not to micromanage.

What should you monitor?

Objectives that can be quantified (e.g. "increase number of new books in the library by 10% this quarter") are fairly easy to monitor. You simply look at the original objective and compare it to your current status. Then, you can assess and forecast whether your future goals are attainable. For example: did the book supply increase by 10 percent? If so, are you on-target for the next quarter? If not, what are the reasons why the supply did not increase? What can be done to overcome this challenge? Are the reasons for not meeting the objective within or outside of our control? Should we reassess our original objective?

Your plan will probably also contain **goals and objectives that cannot be measured in numbers.** For example, the quality of a product or service is more difficult to gauge when a specific numeric value cannot be assigned. So, how do you monitor it? There are ways to gauge progress without relying solely on numbers. For instance, surveys or interviews are good indicators of how well your action plans are working. Customer feedback is invaluable when trying to determine quality level. Or, you may want to hold special open meetings, or even address your plan at a regularly scheduled governing board meeting. Also, there is nothing to preclude you or your staff from informally speaking with customers about how the action plans are progressing. Both measures ensure a wide variety of responses, as well as the potential for solutions that can only enhance your endeavor.

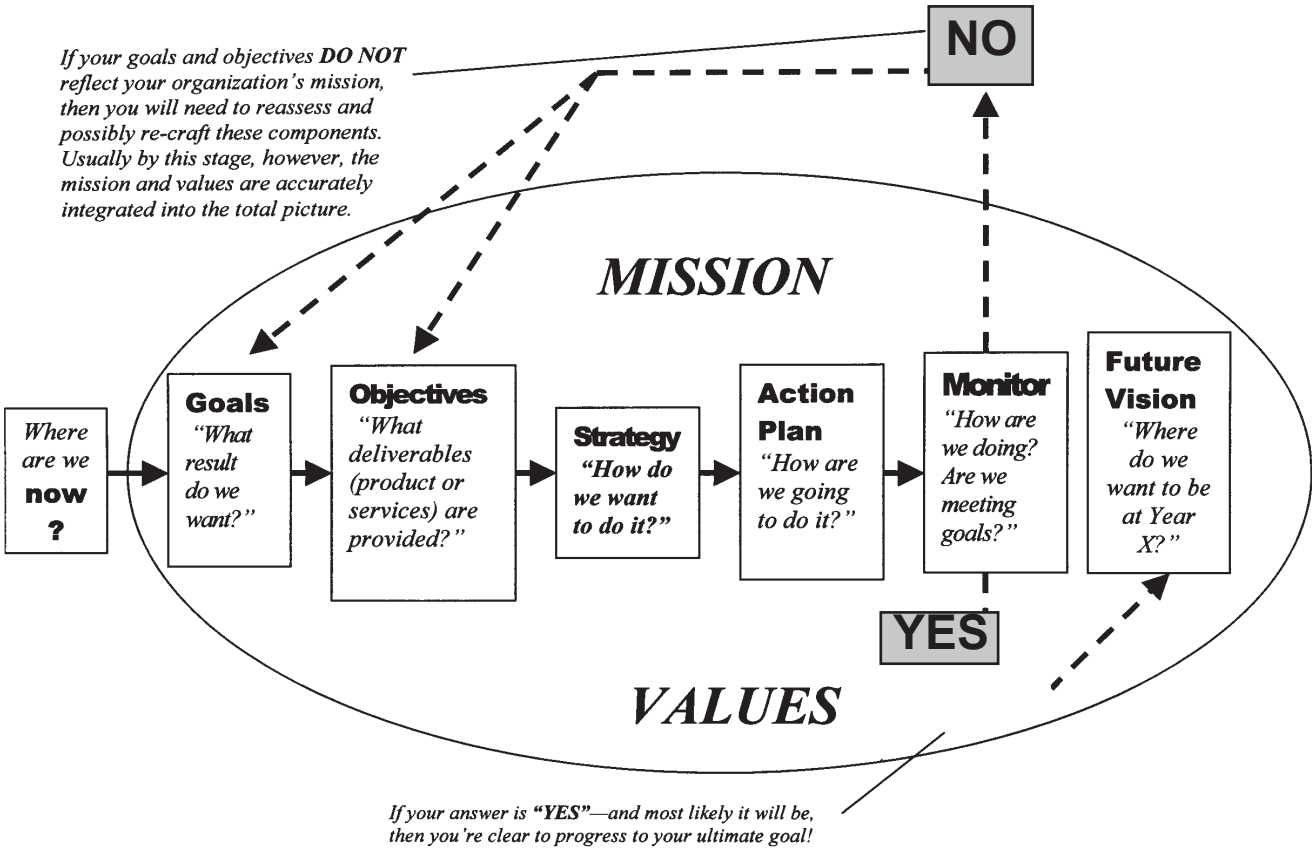
How much will it ***cost****?* Any type of formal measurement, unfortunately, will always have an up-front price tag. Be it in the form of staff time and resources for analysis, dollars to administer and compile a survey or even in overtime for staff to participate in an after-business hours meeting, monitoring is not free. However, the important words here are "up-front." If you spend money in the early stages and maximize your investment by seriously considering and investigating how to effectively implement your findings, then the effort will be worth it in the long-run. Long-run payoff also means that you should monitor short-run costs.

Reporting your findings: openness on all fronts (internal and external) is good practice. By opening the lines of communication not only among the team members, but also with the public and media as well, you are creating an aura of trust and goodwill. Since the strategic plan is, ultimately, the public's plan, it is beneficial if the plan is seen as the initiator of dialogue. Also, don't hesitate to be proactive in your reporting. Tell the media how well things are progressing and which milestones you are expected to reach.

Maintain the trust you have created with your colleagues, team members, citizens and the media by addressing your challenges openly and honestly. Sometimes, a roadblock results in an opportunity for an innovative, creative and even more appropriate solution to emerge.

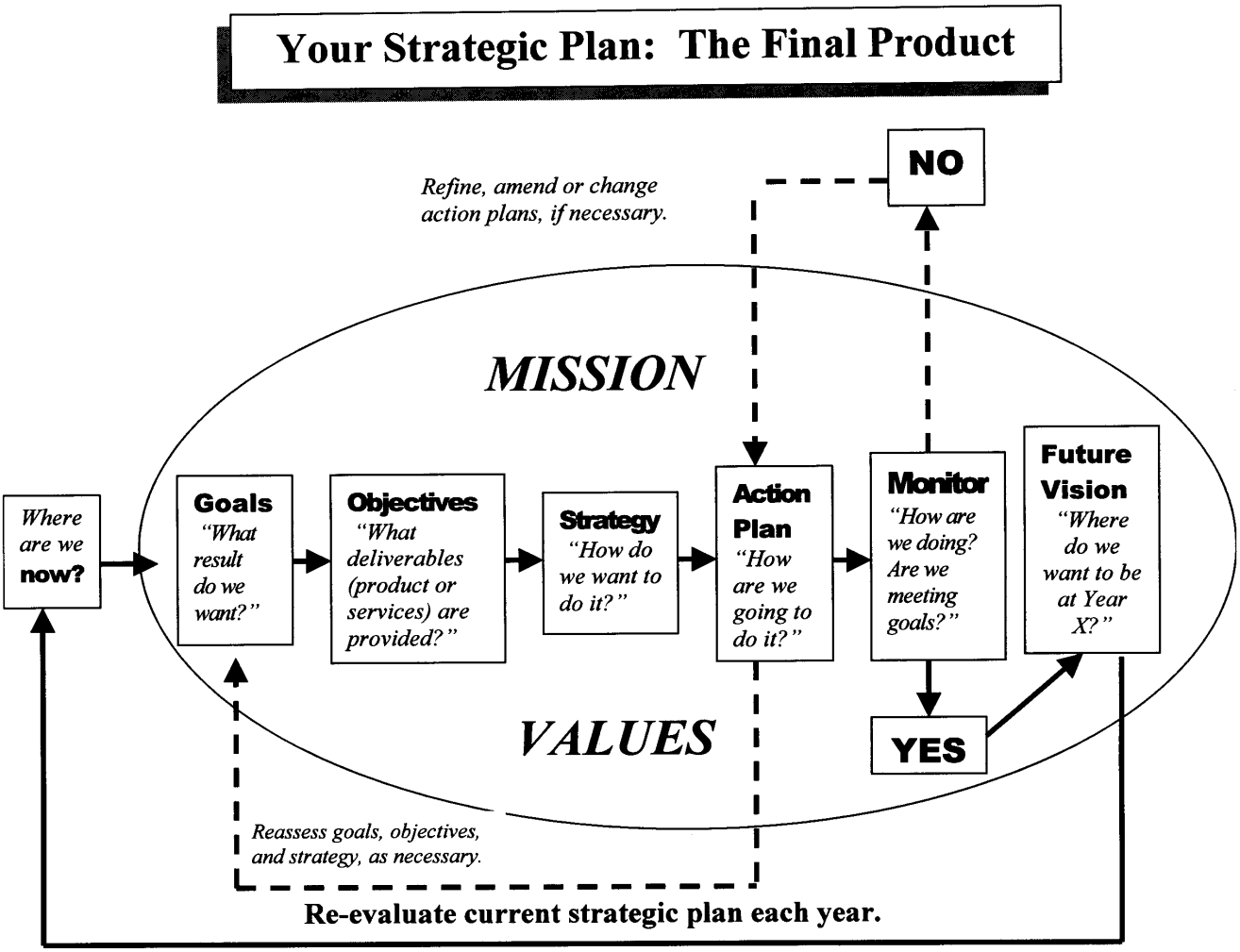
Another benefit in reporting your findings is that it brings important procedural issues to the forefront, allowing for course correction, if needed. Consistent monitoring and tracking is another proactive technique that can ease the tension considerably when you are forced to make decisions in a reactive manner. Certainly, the strategic plan cannot fend off all uncertainties, but periodic course corrections and adjustments may be the next best defense.

Regular monitoring is the key to ensuring that your strategic plan succeeds. As you progress from step to step, be sure that your overall mission is incorporated along the way.



Mission: The main premise in each of the steps is whether or not the plan adheres to your locality's core values. If they do, then you can safely proceed to implementation. If not, then take this opportunity to reassess, first, the goals, objectives and strategies. Are they realistic? Do they meet the customers' needs and still keep the mission intact? If they are not current and reflective of public desires and expectations, then perhaps you need to re-examine your mission. Has your mission changed as a result of the times? Does your mission need to be revised to better accommodate the increasing complexities of government services?

Finally, and this may be assumed, but is always good to mention, be sure that whatever you implement is **within legal parameters**. Your municipality's counsel should be a primary, active member of the strategic planning team. As the plan progresses, it is imperative that she or he reviews all tentative action items to ensure legal compliance.



Putting it all Together: The Strategic Plan

Throughout this chapter, we have discussed the many elements that make up the strategic plan. The next step is putting it all together. As with the preliminary phases, this stage begins with a series of questions:

- Who (which part of the organization) is it for?
- How will we organize it?
- What will be our communication strategies?

Who, or which part of the organization, is it for?

Which department, unit or program will the strategic plan be written for? Or, will the plan be a municipality-wide effort that encompasses every department? Be absolutely clear as to who the intended audience is.

How will we organize it?

This goes back to the basics. Re-examine the fundamental components (mission, vision, goals, objectives and strategies) and **put your thoughts on paper.**

Mission: Reiterate your mission; is it current and applicable?

Vision: What is the ultimate vision for the department, unit, program or municipality? What do you want to achieve?

Goals: Will the goals assist in achieving this vision?

Objectives: Does the goal address customer desires and expectations?

Strategies: Are the targets specific and realistic?

For all of the abovementioned elements, **be sure that you have solicited and considered all pertinent parties' input** (executive, governing board, department heads, department staff, citizens, etc.).

What will our communication strategies be?

How will we make sure that stakeholders (including customers) understand what the strategic plan is about? In constructing the strategic plan, it is imperative that your communication protocol is clear and equitable. First, set-up clear and definite communication lines, making sure that customers and other stakeholders are aware of the process.

Developing Elements of the Strategic Plan

“Mission” and “vision” are two distinct terms that we have used throughout the chapter. However, by the time you reach this stage, it is imperative that you recognize the key differences between the two.

A **mission statement** declares your **purpose**. Why the organization exists and whom it serves should be answered in the mission. A mission is on-going and stays with the organization as long as it is in existence. A **vision statement**, on the other hand, has a specific time frame in which it operates and is essentially a **verbal picture of what you want your organization to be**. It takes the mission (purpose) and uses it as a foundation. Please refer to the “Sample Strategic Plan Key Elements” (pages 1-7) for examples of both.

Mission Statement

A mission statement, as noted, clearly states what your organization does, which services and programs it provides, why you provide them, and for whom. It is a comprehensive statement that articulates a clear purpose. Generally, mission statements are already in place well before business is conducted. However, the changing times often dictate that the existing mission statement be, at a minimum, reviewed. In most cases, certain enhancements or clarification is needed to ensure that the mission meet the needs of its customers and stakeholders, while also remaining true to its original design.

The mission statement is the foundation upon which the strategic plan rests. Therefore, it is critical that you have a solid, current and agreed-upon mission statement in place before you initiate the subsequent steps.

How do you decide whether your mission statement meets these criteria? The easiest way to address this is to convene the strategic planning team and as a group, determine whether your mission statement can pass this test:

MISSION STATEMENT	Yes	No
Does it clearly state what business you are in?		
Does it answer the questions: "who we are, what do we do, for whom (or to whom) we do it, and why it's important?"		
Is the ultimate rationale for existence clear?		
Is the mission broad enough to accomodate current times?		
Can the mission survive changes in administration?		
Is it easily understandable to anyone who reads it?		
Can we justify the dollars we spend on executing the mission?		

If any of the answers are “no,” then the question merits further investigation. Simply, the more checks you can put in the “yes” column, the more solid your strategic plan will be.

The vision statement takes its lead somewhat from the mission statement. A vision articulates where you and your colleagues want your organization (program, department, unit or municipality) to be at the end of a certain time period. It builds upon the organization’s identity and takes those elements which are unique and that coincide with the mission, and crafts a long-term picture of a desired future. Similar to the mission statement test, it is helpful if the strategic planning team sees that the following criteria are met when deciding on what should be included in the vision statement:

VISION STATEMENT	**Yes**	**No**
Does the vision statement provide a clear picture of the organization's future?		
Is the vision statement challenging and inspiring?		
Is the vision statement believeable?		
Will achieving the vision positively contribute to our overall mission?		

Goals

Goals are created in tandem with the vision statement. They are the desired results that fulfill the organization’s mission and also contribute to attaining the vision. Like their counterparts, goals need to be realistic and results-oriented. However, there are some differences that exist when dealing with goals.

Goals may be divided into external and internal categories. While often times they overlap, it is important to note that they may also be directed to specific customers or stakeholders. Next, goals should be measurable. That is, you should be able to gauge a desired result from your goals. The time period for goals is shorter than the mission (never-ending) and the vision (set time period) because they are steps along the way that assist in reaching the final destination. Can you place a time span on a goal such as: “Upgrade municipal services”? Yes. Because the vision is the last step, and the vision’s time frame is pre-determined, the goal may be placed into a time period. By reaching the ultimate vision, you have accomplished your goal to “upgrade municipal services.”

GOALS	Yes	No
Do the goals support the mission?		
Are goals consistent with your legislative authority?		
Do the goals represent a measurable result?		
Do the goals provide direction for action and results?		
Are the goals challenging, but realistic?		
Is there at least one key goal for each program and subprogram that you can reasonably manage?		
Do the goals reflect the organization's priorities (both legislative and administratively)?		
Are the goals important to management, policy-makers and customers?		
Will your goals reflect your program budget?		
Would someone unfamiliar with the program understand what the goals mean?		

Objectives

Objectives take the goals one step further by setting specific and measurable products and services so that the goals may be accomplished. If progress cannot be measured in some fashion (percentage, actual numbers, etc.) then the objective needs to be fine-tuned so that it meets this criterion. Every goal should have at least one objective, as well as one person or persons responsible for meeting that objective. Objectives literally help you progress toward the ultimate vision. Like the other components, objectives must also be considered prior to implementation.

OBJECTIVES	Yes	No
Do the objectives reflect specific desired accomplishments?		
Can progress be measured?		
Are the objectives challenging, yet realistic and attainable within the planning periods?		
Are there enough resources to meet the objectives?		
Do the objectives work toward a result?		
Are there specific time frames associated with the objectives?		
Will meeting objectives lead to goal attainment?		
Is there at least one objective for each goal?		

Strategies

Strategies are a detailed series of milestones used to implement your objectives. Strategies require evaluation of costs and benefits, consequences of each approach, and the appropriate course of action. Once you have determined your strategies, then it will be easier to develop requests for resource allocation.

Strategies lead to the formulation of action plans (a series of milestones) that, as you know, contribute to the ultimate vision. When developing strategies, you should note whether or not they are customer-focused, cost-effective and realistic. One of the benefits associated with strategies is that they may be honed or re-worked as the strategic plan progresses. Many times, economic trends or current events/issues that are out of your control will affect your plan. In order to compensate, you may have to revise various strategies.

Finally, strategies must take into account the impact they will have on the overall plan. What will be the impact of your strategies on the desired results? Is the organization authorized to take action to implement, modify or change the strategy? What are the anticipated consequences of each strategy? Who is responsible for implementation and oversight of each strategy?

STRATEGIES	**Yes**	**No**
Are the strategies framed within a certain time period?		
Are the strategies broken down into specific steps (have operations, procedures and processes been included)?		
Do the strategies contain sufficient detail to track milestones?		
Do the strategies help achieve the objectives?		
Are there enough resources to implement the strategies?		
Do the strategies relate to the ultimate vision?		
Has someone been assigned to each strategy?		

We have also included sample forms (see Appendix E) that you may use once each of the aforementioned tests have been performed.

Application Approaches

Now that you know what the strategic planning process is all about, the question becomes, ***what part of your local government*** do you want to implement it for? For local governments that are new to the process, it is recommended that you **start small**.

Apply strategic planning to a particular part of your organization (department, unit or program). Strategic planning requires a time commitment and may not be intuitive to every participant. Therefore, trying this on a smaller scale may make the process a bit more accessible and manageable. Also, for the first-time strategic planners, a smaller project has a greater chance of succeeding and creating confidence. It also will be easier to manage if things do not go according to plan. The victories you and your work group gain from the small-scale strategic plan will undoubtedly contribute to your effort when you implement this on a larger level.

Once you have mastered the small-scale strategic planning process, you will be able to apply this technique to a larger venue such as an **entire organization or municipality**. The tenets remain the same. What does change, however, is that now you are charged with managing a number of departmental concerns. For example, you will have to keep in mind that, although the organization as a whole has one mission, there will be a number of more specific missions within each department or unit. As with a department or program strategic plan, these missions cannot be ignored; and they don't have to. The key to success on this level will be to devote more time and energy to the preliminary stages. Here are a few tips that may make the larger strategic planning process easier:

- Top-level officials have to be as enthusiastic and committed as you are.
- Be sure that your pre-flight checklist is in order.
- Be sure that the vision and the mission for your local government fit together.
- Be sure that the vision and individual departments' missions are consistent with the vision and mission of your local government.
- Be sure that you have the resources to do this.
- Don't be afraid to take a little more time on the pre-planning end; it will only pay off when you go to craft your actual strategic plan.

The size and scope of the strategic plan is, of course, strictly up to you and your colleagues. You know better than anyone what resources you have or can reasonably expect, and staff capabilities. You should make your final decisions based on particular circumstances. Just be sure that regardless of where you decide to begin, that you allow yourself sufficient time to get the preliminary details in order. Please see Appendix D for a checklist that details each step of the strategic planning process.

The Basics Do Stay the Same!

Regardless of the size of the undertaking (department versus entire local government), the principles and techniques remain the same. You still have to be clear about your mission and vision, you still need definite goals and objectives, and you still need management support.

All of the tools and processes contained in this chapter are applicable to any size strategic plan. What will change, however, are stakeholders who should be involved, resource commitment and possibly the time frame. A smaller project will, understandably require fewer preliminary hours than its larger counterpart. This is not to suggest that a smaller project will be any easier. The message here is to allot enough time for your preliminary work based on the scope of the project.

The organizational tools, such as brainstorming, affinity diagrams and the SWOT analysis, will also work on every level. These are basic rudiments that are designed to assist the smallest to largest group. Because you have control of the work group sizes and meetings, for example, you may also determine how you will best use these tools. Perhaps you may need an additional facilitator for a larger meeting. Or, you may have to convene in the municipal library instead of a smaller conference room. Again, these details simply require thoughtful planning (tools are discussed further in Appendix B).

Challenges and Solutions

There are always a number of challenges involved in such efforts. The following are a few of the more common challenges and possible solutions:

Challenge: Achieving consensus

Solution: *Getting everyone to agree may be difficult at times, but certainly not impossible. Compromise is the key word. Because consensus is as much of a vital component as any other tool, it is imperative that you reach a level of compromise that retains the mission, vision and goals, but also integrates the group's ideas. Many organizational tools are great vehicles for achieving consensus and equity. Brainstorming, affinity diagrams, surveys, prioritization, SWOT analysis and in-depth dialogue are promising solutions for working toward clearing any impasse. Please see Tool #4 in Appendix B.*

Challenge: Working with unions

Solution: *Unions, like other interested parties, are stakeholders. Include union representatives in the process and consider their points of view. Working within legal and contractual parameters should not pose a problem if you have a well-crafted strategic plan.*

Challenge: This is just another management fad

Solution*: Management fads come and go. "Management by Objectives" (MBO), "Zero-Based Budgeting" (ZBB) and a host of other management techniques have been justly retired to the alphabet soup hall of fame. However, strategic planning, by its very construction, is designed to be long-term. The decisions you make today directly affect*

the outcomes tomorrow and the tomorrows after that. In contrast, fads have short life spans and are replaced by another trend. Also remember that when you use strategic planning, you and your colleagues have a considerable influence shaping the direction of your local government in the years ahead.

Challenge: We tried this years ago and it didn't work!

Solution: *Times change. People change. Attitudes change. And most importantly, internal and external environments change. You need to look at all of these factors in an historical context and understand why strategic planning was not conducive to your operations at the time. Were there limited resources? Was there enough staff? Was the technology too simplistic? Too complex? What were your customers' concerns? Were customers sufficiently involved in the process? What were the local and national economic climates? Take a realistic look at these—and whatever other specific factors you think may have been contributory—and see how they have changed. Next, see how these changes have affected your locality. Timing is everything. Perhaps the time was not optimal before. Is it right now? Reference your pre-flight checklist, comparing "then" and "now" in order to make a sound and honest decision.*

Monitoring via Performance Measurement

As mentioned, the successful strategic plan is not static. It needs to be consistently monitored to ensure that goals and objectives are being met and that the original mission and vision are still being adhered to. **"Performance measurement"** is the term used to describe this part of the process. Performance measures are just one tool used to assess how the action phase and results from the actions are progressing.

What should be evaluated and measured?

As a basic rule, you should regularly **review your action items**. Look at whether the steps within your implementation plan are progressing according to schedule, if they are within budget (if applicable) and if they are helping you achieve your goals and objectives as you work toward your ultimate vision. If any of these questions cannot be answered in the affirmative, then take this opportunity to reintroduce the issue and see how you and your team may correct the problems.

If your action plan seems to be in line with your goals and objectives, but your desired outcomes are not being achieved, then you may want to **review your goals and objectives**. In some cases, the problem is not necessarily *how* to get there, but *what* you're trying to do to get to the right place. Ask whether or not the goals, objectives and strategies need revision. Quite often, simple language clarification turns out to be the needed remedy.

When you encounter obstacles that may slow down or impede progress, work backwards. Begin with the ultimate vision ("where do we want to be?") and then review each prior step in an effort to diagnose and pinpoint the problem. Has your mission remained intact? Are the goals and objectives consistent with your overall vision? Are the action plans reasonable? Where are you now?

How often should you measure?

Frequency will, understandably, vary according to goal. However, you should decide upon how many times a year you will measure results, as well as the person(s) responsible for this task. This should be decided during the preparatory stages (before the strategic plan is written) and adhered to throughout the process.

A good practice regarding measurement is to conduct quarterly and annual evaluations. You may want to look at performance more than four times a year, depending upon external circumstances (e.g. economic downturn or upswing) or internal events (e.g. change of leadership) and that's fine. However, resist the urge to monitor too much. By "too much," we mean more than once a quarter. Excessive evaluation can easily turn into micromanagement and can have adverse effects on the people who administer the project, which in turn, will weaken your strategic plan.

Annual evaluations are important components of the strategic planning process. If your plan is to end at the close of one year, then the annual review allows you to determine whether or not you have met your goals. If your plan is multi-year (and most likely it is), the annual evaluation is a good opportunity to see not only if you have achieved your short-term goals, but also to make any course corrections for the next year.

Who should measure?

It is best if a third party unconnected to the activity, task or service measure performance and help set goals. A neutral monitor ensures honesty and a "fresh set of eyes" that may be able to offer constructive criticism and/or support. While you may also include people directly involved in the project, the initiative's integrity is maintained by utilizing the services of a person who is not strongly tied to it.

One potential pitfall associated with performance measurement is that people directly affected by the strategic plan may be tempted to underestimate targets. Thus, when it comes time to measure, these goals appear to have been exceeded. Not only do the false results have an impact on the next period's goals, but they also contribute to the erosion of public trust. One vital reason in implementing a strategic plan is to show the citizens exactly how their valuable resources are being allocated. In short, when goals have no substance, then the implied contract that government has to serving its constituencies to the best of its ability has been broken. Therefore, it is advisable to have a neutral party be involved in the goal-setting and evaluative phases.

How to measure

Transforming information into quantitative data is the essence of performance measurement. To illustrate, let's go back to the City of Townville's Community Safety Unit's strategic plan and monitor progress for the first quarter of the year (January 1-March 31). This is the first phase of their strategic plan:

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY
1. Create volunteer pool to provide more citizen safety	Establish Community Watch Foot Patrol	Initiate Foot Patrol coerage in 60% of districts by end of FY
2. Offer services responsive to citizens' needs	Discontinue non-value services and replace with new-value services	Conduct customer survey and implement at least one new service by the end of 2nd quarter based on customer survey
3. Increase citizen awareness of Community Safety Unit	Increase Unit's visability among citizens	Create Issue #1 of bi-annual newsletter and mail to residents by end of 2nd quarter

As you can see, each goal has been translated into measurable strategies. At the monitoring stage, the task at hand is to see how close the results are in relation to the strategies and their time frames. Ultimately, you want to take your anticipated results and compare them with the actual ones. It is also helpful to add a "Corrective Action" column so that you can initiate new tactics for completing your strategies. Also, a category of this nature can serve as a morale builder. It says that you have not given up hope on the project, rather, that you and your colleagues simply need to take a new or more intense approach. For example:

STRATEGY	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL	ACHIEVED?	CORRECTIVE ACTION?
Initiate Foot Patrol coverage in 60% of districts end of FY	Planned coverage in Districts A, B and C	Have enough recruits to cover Districts A and B	**NO**	**Increase recruitment**
Conduct customer survey	Create customer survey to gauge degree of awareness; disseminate survey; have preliminary list of customer needs	Customer survey created on 1/27; disseminated on 2/7; results are being compiled and preliminary list is written	**YES**	**None needed**
Create Issue #1 of bi-annual newsletter and mail to residents by end of 2nd quarter	Create and disseminate survey to gauge degree of awareness; compile results and draft newsletter by 4/15	Created and disseminated survey, but only 10% of residents responded	**NO**	**Follow-up with telephone survey and compile results**

Some Advice

Patience

Patience is a virtue in this process. As you can see in the above example, not every strategy will be fulfilled 100 percent. This is not to suggest that your actions were wrong. It just means that you may have to adjust your tactic. Part of that tactic could be to allot more time for completion.

Another point to keep in mind is that the first time a new process is undertaken, implementation will be slower. Everyone is struggling with the "learning curve," so understandably the first-run will take more time. As you become more versed in strategic planning, the process will run more smoothly and efficiently. It's important that you do not get down on yourself for not achieving perfection the first time out.

Have realistic expectations

As mentioned, implementing a strategic plan is not the easiest thing for a new group to do. While the theories may seem intuitive, execution among a vast number of people is a bit more difficult. Coordination, consensus building and all of the other related elements associated with implementing the strategic plan take time and a great deal of effort. Therefore, be sure to set realistic expectations. You, too, need some victories and setting astronomical goals is a recipe for disappointment.

For more information regarding performance measurement, please see the Urban Institute's website at www.urban.org/research, the International City and County Manager's website at www.icma.org/performance or the Government Accounting Standards Board at www.gasb.org.

Conclusion

As you can see, the strategic planning process is a circular, rather than linear, planning tool. It goes beyond a traditional cause-and-effect progression and instead takes an interrelated look at the bigger picture. By taking a holistic approach to problem- solving, accomplishing your goals becomes much more feasible and lasting.

The ultimate goal in implementing strategic planning is that your community's needs and future visions are met in a way that is not only efficient, but also equitable. By investing time and resources today, you and your colleagues are ensuring that these visions are a reality tomorrow.

APPENDIX A

Definitions

Customers: people, internal or external to the organization, who receive or use what an organization produces. Customers are also anyone whose best interests are served by the organization's actions.

Environmental scan: an analysis of key external elements or forces that influence the conditions under which an organization functions.

Facilitator: that person who keeps the discussion flowing during meetings. A facilitator does not express personal opinions, but instead ensures that each of the meeting participants' views and opinions are heard and considered.

Goal: results-oriented broad statements of policy or intention and representing particular aspects of the vision.

Mission: a statement outlining an organization's purpose. It describes what the organization strives to do and for whom it's done. It is the way you communicate to your customers (citizens to whom services are provided) and other stakeholders (those with a vested interest) why your local government exists, how they benefit or are impacted.

Objectives: specific products or services that are needed to attain a goal.

Organization: local government or functional part (department, program, unit) for which a strategic planning initiative is applicable.

Performance measures: a tool that assesses work performed and results achieved.

Stakeholders: organizations, groups or individuals that have a vested interest or expect certain levels of performance or compliance from the organization. Stakeholders do not necessarily use the products or receive the services of a program. Customers are one group of stakeholders.

Strategic planning*:* an on-going, systematic process that takes a forward-looking approach to an organization's goals and objectives.

Strategic plan: a results-oriented blueprint consisting of goals, objectives and strategies in order to achieve a desired vision.

Strategy: key steps (milestones) in achieving an objective.

SWOT Analysis: An acronym used to denote an organization's **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats. It is part of the Internal/External Assessment an organization conducts to analyze and evaluate internal conditions (Strengths and Weaknesses) and external factors (Opportunities and Threats) that affect the organization.

Team: A group of people working together to achieve a common goal or objective. Teams operate under more specific conditions and have the following characteristics:

- Shared commitment to a common purpose;
- Specific mission, goal and objective;
- Operate under ground rules such as respect for others and their ideas;
- Willingness to offer and receive constructive criticism;
- Commitment to work together by using group processes and techniques.

Vision: a picture that your administration crafts today of what your local government's future will look like.

APPENDIX B

Tools of the Trade

We all know that having the proper tool can literally make or break a project. Strategic planning is no different. The following tools are frequently used in strategic planning initiatives:

Tool #1: Teams

Teamwork is a critical component in strategic planning, particularly in organizing and managing the strategic planning team. Based on the magnitude of the initiative (e.g. one department versus an entire municipality), you are free to construct work groups to help achieve the objectives. It is important to recognize that the strategic planning team sets the framework for the entire process.

> *"Team" versus "group":* A **team** is comprised of a group of people working together to achieve a common goal or objective. Teams operate under more specific conditions and have the following characteristics:

- Shared commitment to a common purpose;
- Specific mission, goal and objective;
- Operate under ground rules such as respect for others and their ideas;
- Willingness to offer and receive constructive criticism;
- Commitment to work together by using group processes and techniques.

Conversely, a **group** does not possess all of these traits. A group is convened for a more limited purpose, but a "team" makes the group coherent and effective.

> *Strategic planning team:* In the strategic planning process, you will need to create a team that will lead the overall effort. Usually, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) heads, or "sponsors," the team. The CEO is seen as the champion of the cause and lends his or her support to the entire movement. The next member of the team, perhaps the individual who spearheaded the effort, for example the Chief Fiscal Officer, would follow. The other members of the initial team may include: governing board members, other key department staff and perhaps a key stakeholder(s). From this team, the work groups emerge.

Typical Team Structure

Sponsor
(CEO, Manager)

↓

Leader
(key department official—CFO, Dept. head, board/council member)

↓

Members
(governing board members, key department staff)

Work group: A work group is comprised of a number of participants whose collective job is to meet a certain objective. For example, one work group may be responsible for gathering data, while another work group surveys customers. Not only do work groups help organize the various tasks that need to be accomplished and ensure steady progress, but they also allow the strategic planning team to concentrate on the "big picture."

The overall process will proceed much more smoothly if you take the time to create specific teams and work groups with a common goal.

Tool #2: Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a process that allows every suggestion or idea to be heard and considered. A brainstorming session is best conducted with a specific time allotment, a facilitator (leader) and a white board, flipchart or even big pieces of paper mounted to the wall so that each comment may be captured. During this time, the recorder writes down each idea. Once the time expires, the facilitator, that person who maintains the meeting ground rules and assists the work groups with reaching the objective, guides the entire group to carefully consider each idea. The key to a successful session is to create a safe and encouraging atmosphere, free of negativity, where every member has the opportunity to contribute. The leader also needs to discourage competition among the members, while also encouraging members to assume informal leadership roles. Brainstorming often generates creative and innovative ideas, while at the same time, helps to unify the group as they pursue a common goal.

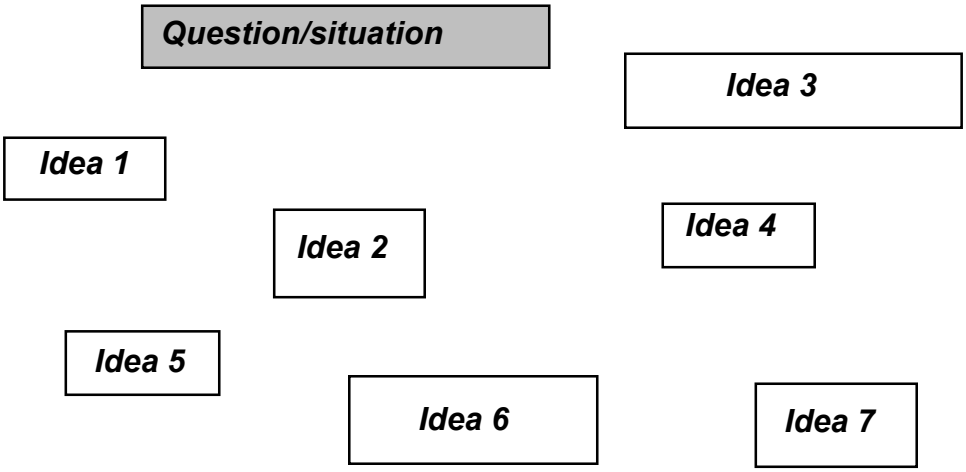
Tool #3: Affinity Diagram

An Affinity Diagram is another organizational tool that allows everyone to generate a wide variety of ideas and then summarize them into natural groupings. This tool takes brainstorming one step further and classifies them into like categories. Then, the team is able to consider them as they relate to each other and the objective to be achieved.

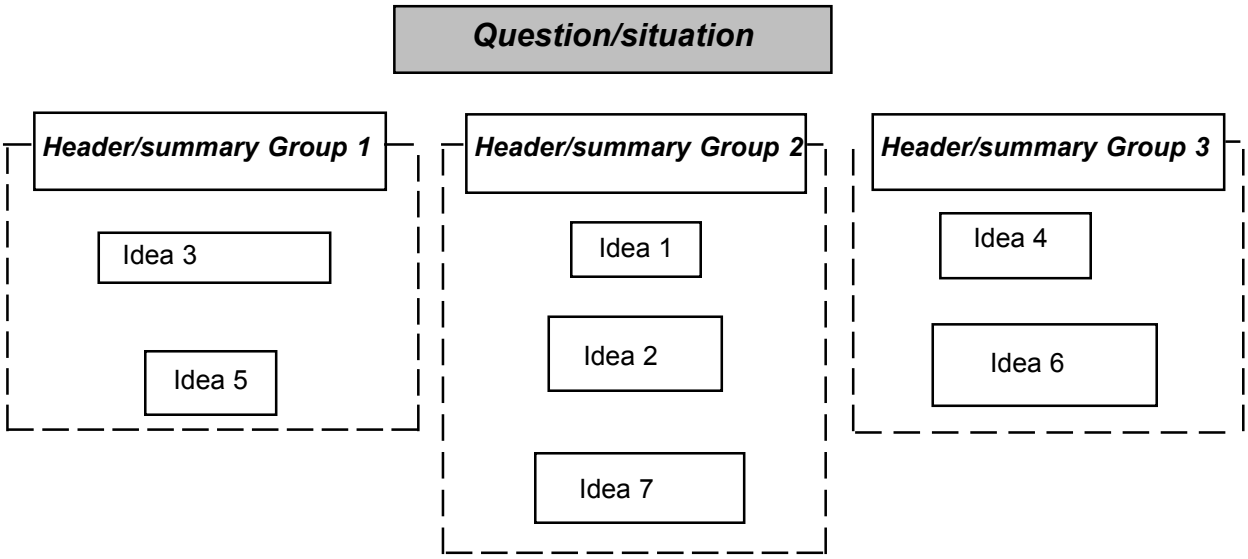
To construct an affinity diagram, you will need pieces of paper that can be adhered to a surface (e.g. “Post-It” notes) and an expansive area, such as a wall or board, to stick the papers to. The goal is to present a pertinent question and then have the group brainstorm. Have each participant summarize their ideas, then transfer each idea using key words and phrases on each note. The rule is: one note per idea. Then have people stick the notes on the wall. The benefits to having the team members post them on the surface are twofold. First, the mobility is a good way to break up the meeting. Not only does it re-stimulate people, but it also allows for informal interaction. Also, it gives people a chance to see what their colleagues have written and as a result, may spark additional ideas. Secondly, it maintains the “safe” environment that is so crucial to successful brainstorming. For those who are more comfortable with the written instead of the spoken word, the textual component of the affinity diagram allows those quieter voices to be heard and also maintains a level of confidentiality.

Visually, the affinity diagram would progress like this:

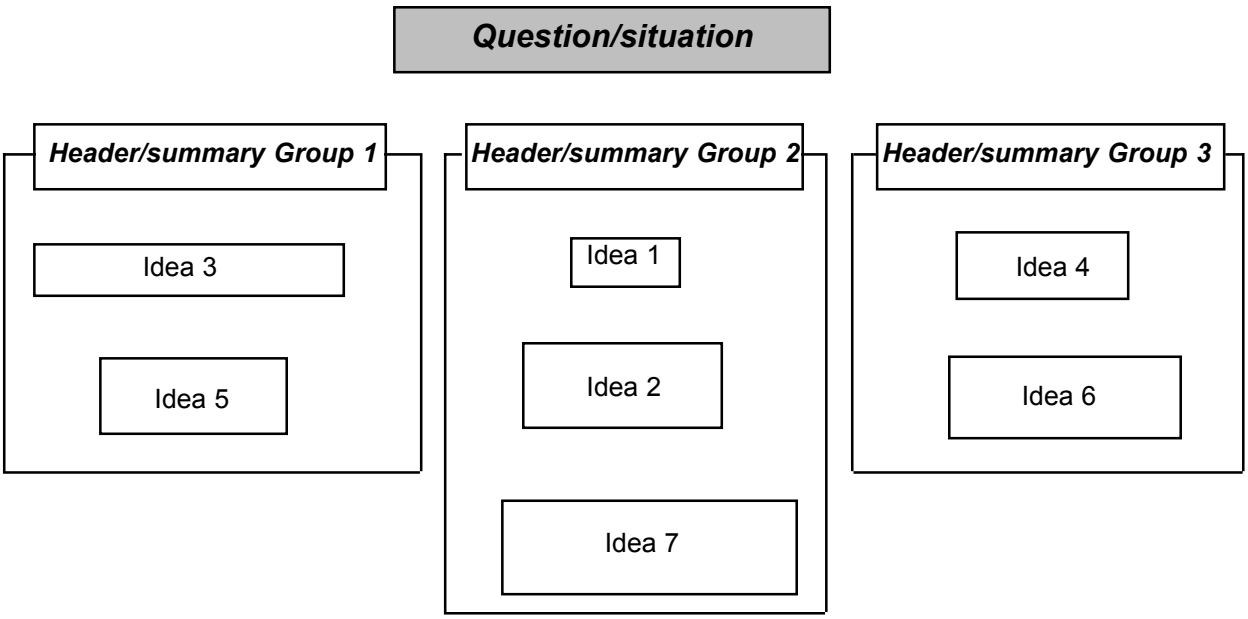
Step 1: *Present question/situation and solicit ideas. Have group members write ideas using key words and phrases on postable note paper and place them on the wall.*



Step 2: *Sort ideas into similar categories.*



Step 3: *Reach consensus to determine headers or summaries for each grouping, making each column more precise. Then connect each grouping. The final product should look like this:*



Since each participant can see how their idea(s) contributed to the end result, the Affinity Diagram helps the group to focus, reach common ground and build commitment for results.

Tool #4: Consensus

Achieving agreement, or consensus, among the various group members is, at times, challenging, but definitely doable. The cornerstone of consensus is a shared commitment to the objectives to be achieved and a willingness to compromise in order to achieve them. However, compromise does not mean that the mission, vision and goals are sacrificed. When you achieve consensus, you are integrating many feasible ideas into a position or decision that you can live with. Once consensus is reached, you must support the resulting position or decision publicly, even if it is not what you would have preferred. **It is vital that you have consensus for each step along the way, or you risk damaging the integrity of the strategic plan.**

Tool #5: Prioritization

Because this entire process is highly organized, you and your team need to be able to rank ideas based on importance, timeliness and applicability to the objectives. Ranking criteria is a very common technique that helps participants agree on which considerations are most important to achieving the objectives. Reaching common ground is also imperative because each participant approaches the planning process with different "lenses," or perceptions. Quite often, the desired outcome is the same, but the way one-person views it is different than another's. Therefore, by prioritizing by using specific criteria (e.g. "most cost-effective," "customer satisfaction level," etc.) you are allowing everyone to be on the same page and encouraging consensus.

Tool #6: SWOT Analysis

Another tool needed to implement the strategic plan is a SWOT analysis. In a SWOT analysis, you conduct internal and external assessments and look at your organization's **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats. This is helpful because it serves as another readiness gauge that allows you to carefully examine how internal and external factors affect your organization and its services. A SWOT Analysis can also offer you valuable insights about probable outcomes of certain action plans and can also spark productive dialogue.

What should you look for? In a SWOT Analysis, note any patterns, trends or recurring actions. Then, look for those incidents that are not as common. Both styles of incidents can offer clues as to what is typical and atypical behavior and how your proposed plans may affect them.

What are considered strengths and weaknesses?

Strengths are supplies or talents that can assist your locality in accomplishing your vision. For example, staff capabilities may be consider strengths.

Weaknesses are supply or talent deficiencies that impede you from achieving your vision, such as a flawed communication system.

What are opportunities and threats?

Opportunities are situations that can have a positive effect on your organization. Federal funding or support can be considered an opportunity.

Threats are the opposite of opportunities. They consist of factors that can have a negative impact on your local government. A mandate, for example, may be a threat to existing operations.

Why are these important? Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are all important because they, either collectively or alone, will have a significant influence on your strategic plan. The more of these you can identify, the more solid your strategic plan will be.

APPENDIX C

Considerations for Internal Assessment

Organizational Culture:

- How willing are people to embrace change?
- What is the dominant management style?
- What type of decision-making process is prominent?
- How is information communicated?

People:

- How many people are in the organization?
- What is the turnover rate?
- What's the level of employee job satisfaction?
- What skill levels are present?
- Is staff given the chance for self-improvement and learning?

Organizational Structure:

- What is the formal structure? Top-down? Bottom-up?
- What is the informal structure?
- How much input do non-management staff have?

Organizational Processes:

- How is work delegated?
- What is the reporting structure?
- What types of locality-specific policies are practiced?
- What state or federally mandated polices impact your local government?

Funding:

- What is the available level of funding?
- How will employees be compensated for additional work hours?
- Is there enough funding to hire additional staff?

Technology:

- What types of technology are available?
- Are people trained to use the technology?
- What percentages of services are conducted with technology?
- Is there a plan to upgrade technology?

APPENDIX D

Checklist

Preliminary stage 1 ***(laying foundation)***

- ☐ Executive support
- ☐ Governing board support
- ☐ Implementation site (department, unit, program, municipality)
- ☐ Examine current environment (internal and external)
- ☐ Develop a **mission** statement (if appropriate)
- ☐ Determine long-term **vision**
- ☐ Ensure that vision concurs with **mission**
- ☐ Resources
    - financial
    - technological
    - personnel
    - time
- ☐ Have all key people been involved (department heads, key staff, et cetera)?

Preliminary stage 2 ***(prepare for first round of meetings)***

- ☐ Have key people been added (staff, citizens, media, et cetera)?
- ☐ Initial meeting set?
- ☐ Set agenda
- ☐ Secure facilitator(s)
- ☐ Set format (how meeting will be conducted, breakout times, et cetera)
- ☐ Choose organizational tools

Preliminary stage 3 ***(preparing to craft the strategic plan)***

- ☐ Articulate format to group
- ☐ Reiterate the **mission** and **vision**
- ☐ Create teams
- ☐ Inform group about communication protocol
- ☐ Conduct brainstorming sessions and utilize analysis tools
- ☐ Set **goals, objectives** and **strategies**
- ☐ Brainstorm action plan ideas
- ☐ Set next meeting(s)

Constructing the Strategic Plan

- ☐ Reiterate **mission, vision, goals**, **objectives** and **strategies** (amend, if necessary)
- ☐ Revisit action plans that arose in brainstorming sessions
- ☐ Determine **action plans** (via consensus)
- ☐ Make sure that action plans coincide with mission and values
- ☐ **Write strategic plan**
- ☐ Set time intervals for regular **monitoring**

Monitoring and Tracking the Strategic Plan

- ☐ Evaluate progress of **action plans**. Do they coincide and compliment the ultimate **mission** and **vision**? (amend, if necessary)
- ☐ Reconvene teams to make course corrections
- ☐ Inform committee and team members about any course corrections
- ☐ Report findings to executive and governing board officials
- ☐ Update citizens and media via meetings, print or electronic alerts
- ☐ Set additional meetings to look at future issues, milestones
- ☐ Look at short- and long-term progress—next month, next year, next few years and amend strategic plan as you see fit**.**

APPENDIX E

Sample Forms **Page**

Mission, values and vision.....52
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Identifying Customers.....56
Goals and Affected Customers and Stakeholders.....57
Action Plans: Getting from Here to There.....58

Mission, Values & Vision

Mission Statement (why we're here):

Values (what is important to us?):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Vision (where do we want to be in the future?):

Environmental Scan: Internal

Issues that are going on ***within*** the organization:

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

6._____

7._____

8._____

9._____

10._____

Environmental Scan: External

Issues that are going on ***outside of*** the organization:

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

6._____

7._____

8._____

9._____

10._____

Identifying Stakeholders

Internal Stakeholders *(who **HERE** is involved)*	**External Stakeholders** *(who **OUTSIDE** is involved)*

Identifying Customers

Internal Customers *(who **HERE** is involved)*	**External Customers** *(who **OUTSIDE** is involved)*

Goals and Affected Customers and Stakeholders

GOAL:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Who will goal affect?	Positive or negative effect

Action Plans: Getting from Here to There

ACTION ITEM:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

When do we want to accomplish this? _____

Who should be involved? _____

What are the anticipated costs? _____

Are there any potential obstacles? If so, how do we deal with them? _____

_____

Does this affect other departments, units or programs? If so, how? _____

_____

How will this impact customers and stakeholders? _____

_____

Do we have executive approval? _____

Does action plan meet legal standards? _____

Does this action item and plan support our mission and values? _____

APPENDIX F

Additional Information

Publications

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New York State Office of the State Comptroller (www.osc.state.ny.us)

State of Iowa (http://www.dom.state.ia.us/planning_performance/files/aga/2007/Agency_Strategic_Planning_Guidebook_2007.pdf

State of Texas (www.sao.state.tx.us)

State of Virginia (http://www.vita.virginia.gov/EAD/default.aspx?id=11300)

International City and County Managers Association (www.imca.org)

The Urban Institute (www.urban.org)

The Government Accounting Standards Board (www.gasb.org)

Miscellaneous

To see an example of an organization's **mission** and **values** statements, please visit the New York State Department of Transportation's information page Located at: (https://www.dot.ny.gov/about-nysdot/mission)

For an example of "**Core Values**," please reference the Federal Bureau of Investigation's website (www.fbi.gov).

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