

PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLANNING
PROCESS

FOR THE XYZ NONPROFIT
ASSOCIATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section I (pages 1 - 10)

The Strategic Planning Process

Section II (pages 11 -12)

Alternatives for Managing the Strategic Planning Process

SECTION I

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Key Elements for Successful Strategic Plans

The Planning Process – A strategic planning process should be tailored to the individual needs of the organization. The process should follow a disciplined yet iterative approach that includes a comprehensive situational assessment, strategy development and finally an implementation plan that includes goals and objectives spanning a 3- to 5-year timeframe.

The Consultant - Normally a consultant is engaged to assist in the development of a strategic plan. The scope of work the consultant performs can be limited to facilitation of the process, or the consultant can be more involved. The scope of work a consultant performs is determined by the resources and expertise of the organization engaging the consultant.

Data Collection and Analysis – One of the most important phases of the strategic plan is the situational assessment. This assessment needs to be data-driven both quantitatively and qualitatively. The skills necessary to complete the situational assessment include the ability to collect, analyze and interpret data from multiple sources. Projects normally will require the collection of data from existing sources as well as the generation of data from new sources. Skills working with archival data sets, observation, surveying, focus groups and personal interviews with field experts are necessary to identify the trends in the external environment. These trends – in demographics, risk and protective factors, access, and barriers – will set the backdrop for recommended strategies; thus, their collection, analysis and interpretation are critical.

Consensus Building with Stakeholders – The planning process should form a partnership with stakeholders. This partnership approach involves educating constituents on why this project is something they should care about and how to be meaningfully involved. Ultimately the goal is to have consensus on a common vision for addressing the wellness in the community.

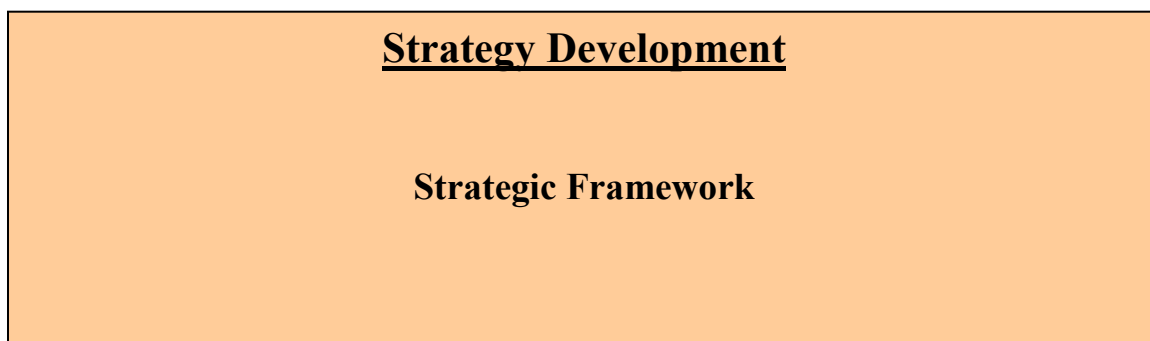
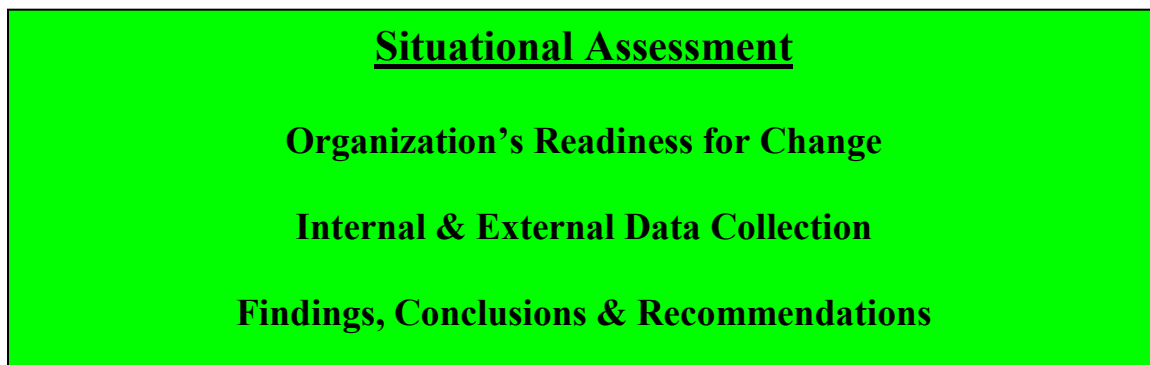
Effective – Plans should be practical and provide a roadmap for critical decision-making. Data-driven plans are predictive of community trends, allowing the organization's members to take advantage of pending opportunities and to avoid missteps. Additionally, the planning process must address the capacity of community resources. Well designed plans result in end products that recommend just enough initiatives to focus the organization while maximizing its capabilities.

The Process

The planning process addresses the vision, mission, actions and resource allocation that impact the efficiency, effectiveness and success of the endeavor. The planning process consists of developing a situational assessment, strategy and implementation plan.

I have found the following process to be a successful method for the development of well-designed and useful plans. This method incorporates approaches for plan development, the roles of organization members in the planning process, the necessary reviews and approvals throughout the levels of an organization, and communication of the plan to the organization's constituencies. The following exhibit depicts the various phases of the strategic planning process.

Overview of Strategic Planning Process



The Situational Assessment

The goal of the situational assessment is to gather information to facilitate and support the development of conclusions and recommendations.

Organization's Readiness for Change

An organization undergoes a “transformational mind-shift” when it redefines itself by mission rather than the programs of its individual members. When an organization is no longer tied to its members' programs, it is free to make changes. This concept should be understood and reinforced throughout the planning process. ***The organization's members are changing the fulcrum of the organization from the maintenance of current services to the objectives of the organization's mission.***

Therefore, the XYZ Nonprofit Association's planning process should **not** be undertaken without an assessment of the organization's readiness for change. Readiness for change must begin at the leadership level. Whether this is the chair of the organization and/or informal leaders, it is imperative that the leadership of the organization be aware of the need for change. This awareness will initiate and motivate the planning process. ***If a change process engages the leadership and members of the organization, there is an increased likelihood for acceptance of actual change.***

The Strategic Planning Team

The strategic planning team is comprised of an organization's members and other constituencies that have interest and expertise in the project. This team may provide input and recommendations throughout the planning process.

Communication Plan

When new strategy causes real change in a community, challenges, confrontations and staunch opposition can be expected. The best way to counter these is to have the support of formal and informal leaders. These leaders will be useful in helping constituencies understand and accept the new strategy. ***Do not underestimate the importance of managing the politics associated with the planning process.***

There is no prescriptive communication plan that works for all organizations. Each organization has its own unique culture which must be understood. It's important to identify the stakeholders who may be impacted and determine the proper communications vehicle to inform them of the planning process. This may consist of one-on-one meetings, group meetings, e-mails and telephone calls. Whatever the means of communication, the goal is to identify and alleviate any fears or barriers that certain stakeholders may have. As the plan progresses, you should continue to monitor the need to communicate with stakeholders.

The Situational Assessment (continued)

The main purpose of the internal and external data collection is to identify those areas with trends that may have the greatest impact on child abuse and neglect.

The internal and external assessment process can be where organizations make their biggest mistake. Often, extensive time is spent on the organization's strengths and weaknesses and very little effort in examining the external environment. The external environment is the key to identifying those trends which give rise to successful strategy.

Internal Assessment

Begin by writing a brief overview of the organization's current mission, vision, values, services, products and markets. At this step of the process, it is not important to compile extensive details of the performance and operations of the organization.

Questionnaires, surveys or interviews should be directed to the organization's members. Questions should be developed which solicit opinions about the organization's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (this is the basic SWOT analysis). Begin by testing the questions with a few individuals before sending out a full mailing or conducting extensive interviews. E-mail is an excellent vehicle to quickly solicit input from a variety of individuals. The SWOT can also be conducted at a meeting with all the organizations' members.

Understanding the opinions of your constituencies can help you identify adjustments to the planning process, prepare you for any confrontations, and uncover trends.

This information can be used to determine the organization's members' interest and capacity to be part of the efforts undertaken by CFI. This is all that is needed for the internal assessment at this stage of the process. Remember, the assessment should not cause actual change in the internal aspects of the organization.

External Assessment

It is important to direct significant time and money to the examination of your external environment. If done well, this analysis will uncover trends that are critical for strategy development and later, the acceptance of that strategy by the organization's constituencies. Some areas of external assessment which may impact the organization include the following:

- Community needs assessment (Analysis of community resources and service gaps related to risk and protective factors)
- Data to support the development of a problem statement
- Demographics of Sacramento
- Political, economic and social forces
- The latest research in CFI field(s) of interest
- Identify and examine how other similar organizations have addressed their community's issues.
- Review of model programs
- Current and emerging technologies
- Cultural characteristics of current and potential populations to be served by the organization.

The Situational Assessment (continued)

The goal is to identify those areas with trends which may have the greatest impact on the organization and the constituencies it serves.

The search for information can mire the organization in a never-ending quest for more and more information. The planning team should meet frequently to discuss what they have learned. These sharing, or learning sessions, will soon uncover recurring themes. This method will help identify and direct the team toward relevant areas which require further investigation and discussion.

Methods of information gathering include attending conferences, use of GIS systems, reading publications and interviewing leaders in the field of child abuse and neglect. Also, contact other, similar organizations to identify their strategic successes and lessons from their failures. There are organizations out there that have completed what you are now attempting to do.

Organizations and individuals in your community may have limited knowledge of child and family issues. Do not confine yourself to your specific geographic region. Seek out information from local, state, national and international sources. With the advent of the internet and communication technologies such as video conferencing and e-mail, this process has become extremely feasible, even for the smallest organization.

A note on interviews: Interviews are an excellent tool for identifying the trends which are pertinent for strategy development. Interviewing can be an important learning experience for members of the organization and create relationships that may be useful in the future.

Conduct interviews in person or on the telephone. Interviews with acknowledged leaders in the child and family wellness field and other related fields lend credibility to subsequent conclusions and recommendations. Do not be shy about contacting these individuals. They are usually flattered to be asked.

When conducting an interview, be sure to include some open-ended questions. Modify, add and delete questions as the interview process progresses. Asking the right questions is as important as the answers you will receive. One question that can provide excellent information is asking the interviewee who else might be beneficial for you to contact.

Remember, this step of the situational assessment is about assembling facts. Facts are not interpretations, conclusions or recommendations. Once the external assessment is completed, review the internal assessment to determine if there are any areas which need a more in-depth analysis.

Lastly, categorize all of the information into sections. This will be necessary for reviewing the information at a planning retreat.

The Situational Assessment (continued)

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Once information-gathering is complete, the organization should conduct a planning retreat. The goal of the retreat is to identify one or two findings, conclusions (these are trends) and recommendations for each section. For example, ten sections of internal and external assessment can result in over thirty findings, conclusions and recommendations. As with any process, contradictions noted along the way should be resolved.

To accomplish this will require a half to full day meeting. The situational assessment should be compiled and distributed to organization's members at least 2 weeks in advance of the meeting. Each member should be assigned certain sections of the assessment that they will study in depth and be ready to discuss at the retreat. Any other stakeholders who may have an impact or be impacted by the plan's recommendations should be invited. The following page depicts a sample working-agenda for this meeting.

Planning Retreat Agenda

- I) **Reasons for development of a strategic plan**
The Chair of the organization reiterates: 1) the reasons for the creation of a strategic plan; 2) the Strategic Planning Team's involvement; 3) the major steps of the planning process (situational assessment, strategy development, implementation plan).

- II) **Breakout groups**
The full group is divided into smaller work-groups of six to eight members. Each work-group is assigned a section(s) of the situational analysis. Their task is to develop one major finding, conclusion and recommendation for the section(s) they have been assigned.

- III) **Groups Report Out**
The full group is reassembled. One member of each work-group is responsible to report to the retreat participants. Any comments from the participants are noted.

- IV) **Next Steps**
Chair of the organization refers the retreat participants to the planning process outline.

This method can be very helpful to involve the constituencies of the community in the planning process. ***Again, it is vital the information gathered in the situational assessment be received by the planning retreat participants at least two weeks prior to the planning retreat.***

The Situational Assessment (continued)

The Situational Assessment Report

The next step is to develop **three to five significant** recommendations from all that have been identified. Relevant findings and conclusions will be used as support for these recommendations. The recommendations will be the basis of the executive summary for the situational assessment. If there are too many recommendations, it will be difficult for your constituencies to comprehend and remember them – and to act on them effectively.

The goal of this report is for the organization members to approve the report's significant recommendations. This will be the foundation from which strategy will be developed.

A typical format for the report is as follows:

- **Introduction** – The reasons for the creation of a strategic plan and review of the major steps of the planning process (situational assessment, strategy development, implementation plan). This section should be one page in length.
- **Executive Summary** – A brief overview of the organization's history, mission, vision and values. Highlights will include the significant recommendations supported by findings, conclusions and values. Information supporting any changes to the current mission, vision or values will be noted. This summary should be no more than three to five pages in length.
- **Situational Assessment** – Included will be a full copy of all findings, conclusions, and recommendations as well as the information that has been compiled.

The report should be reviewed by the Strategic Planning Team and then submitted for approval by the organization before beginning the strategy development phase.

Strategy Development

Strategy sometimes takes the form of an endless number of 3- to 5-year goals and objectives. I do not utilize this format because it often produces so many goals and objectives that stakeholders can be overwhelmed. The perception which led to the creation of the goals and objectives becomes blurred. Without this perception, the organization may lose its ability to exploit future unforeseen opportunities.

For this reason, I prefer a strategic framework. *A strategic framework facilitates decisions that determine the nature and direction of the organization.* The framework should include no more than 5 to 10 statements. The statements have no deadlines and are valid until proven otherwise. At a minimum, the statements should address the following

- nature of the programs
- markets
- quality standards
- effectiveness measurements
- efficiency benchmarks or controls
- criteria for expansion
- criteria for major areas of pursuit for the organization
- revenue generation guidelines
- financial stability
- types of resources to be utilized

The organization can create and then validate the framework by testing it with recent decisions and future opportunities. For example, the organization's staff can review a recent decision using the strategic framework to guide their discussion and ultimate decision. If this produces a valid decision, then try the same procedure using future opportunities discovered in the situational assessment. The framework's guidance for decisions relating to these future opportunities may only be validated by the intuition of the team members.

If decisions using the framework are erroneous, contradictory or unrealistic then either the framework is incomplete or the findings, conclusion or recommendations from the situational assessment are flawed. If this is the case, revisit these items and then continue to test the framework's efficacy.

Implementation Plan

Once the strategic framework has been validated, the development of an implementation plan can begin. The implementation plan contains the major initiatives, goals and objectives.

Major Initiatives

Major initiatives are necessary to determine the activities that will move the organization forward to successfully address its mission. Initiatives are broad statements, covering a 3-year time period, using a format similar to the strategic framework. Initiatives differ from strategic statements because they are operational and direct a specific measurable action. The following example compares a strategic statement with a major initiative:

Strategic Statement:

We collaborate with organizations that support best practice characteristics and are congruent with our vision, mission, values and strategy.

Major Initiative:

Identify organizations with whom our organization should partner.

The first statement defines a direction, market, quality standards and criteria for expansion. The second statement calls for **specific action** which is an operational characteristic. Be careful about creating too many initiatives. Sometimes, fewer initiatives can better focus an organization's efforts. Once the major initiatives are developed, goals and objectives can be developed for each year of the plan.

Goals and Project Plans

The plan will include specific goals and objectives that support major initiatives. Goals will be developed for each year of the plan. Project Plans should be developed for each goal for year 1 only. It may take several goals to move toward the achievement of a single initiative. Goals should be smart, that is to say:

- **Specific**
- **Measurable**
- **Accountable**
- **Realistic**
- **Time dated**

Project plans require deadlines and the identification of specific individuals to be responsible for their completion.

Conclusion

A final Strategic Planning Team meeting is held to review and recommend approval of the implementation plan by the Board of Directors.

Plan for Planning

	Activity
May 23	Initial Meeting with Staff Leadership to Review Planning Process
May 23	Review Planning Process With Board of Directors
	Initial Planning Meeting with Staff Leadership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess Organizational Readiness for Change • Identify Strategic Planning Team Members • Develop Communication Plan • Create Plan for Planning (including identifying deadlines for planning activities and responsibilities)
	Kick-off Planning Meeting with Organization's Members
	Internal & External Data Collection
	SWOT Meetings (with CFI staff)
	Board Evaluation of CFI
	Completion of Data Collection
	Planning Retreat (Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations)
	Review and/or Approval of Situational Assessment Report
	Development of Strategic Framework by Strategic Planning Team
	Approval of Strategic Framework by Board of Directors
	Development of Implementation Plan by Strategic Planning Team
	Approval of Implementation Plan by Board of Directors
	Dissemination of Strategic Plan
	Begin Implementation

SECTION IV

ALTERNATIVES FOR MANAGING THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Alternative 1 - Utilize the organization's members to facilitate and create the strategic plan.

Advantages

The organization can begin the process immediately. No additional funding is required to develop the strategic plan.

Disadvantages

Very time consuming for organization members. Also, the community may see the strategic plan as benefiting the individual organization members rather than addressing a problem in the community.

Members must have the appropriate strategic planning skills (Please refer to the *Experience and Skills Required for Strategic Planning* at the end of this section.)

Alternative 2 - Hire a consultant to facilitate a strategic planning process. Organization members would be responsible for content (especially the situational assessment).

Advantages

Consultant will keep the process moving forward. Community may view the resulting strategic plan as a positive step for addressing child and family issues. Moderate cost.

Disadvantages

Funding will be required. The organization members' responsibility for constructing the situational assessment may still be too taxing.

Alternative 3 - Hire a consultant to both facilitate and provide content for the situational assessment.

Advantages

Consultant will ensure process moves forward. Organization members will be able to develop a data-driven strategy based on content from the situational assessment.

Disadvantages

This alternative can be very expensive and normally requires the organization to seek government or private foundation funding.

Experience And Skills Required for Strategic Planning

Mobilization of Diverse Constituencies

Data Collection

Original Data Collection

Ethnographic and Triangulation Techniques

Archival Data

Surveying

Focus Groups

Personal Interviews

Professional Network

Ability to Interpret Research Studies

Training

Facilitation

Writing

Management

Experience in Strategy Development

Program Evaluation

Experienced Implementing Strategic Plans

Process Management Techniques

Financial Acumen

Technology Background