



Self-Paced Guide

Strategic Planning

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) *READY Nonprofits*

Presented by Strategic Consulting Partners

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The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a regional economic development entity that represents a partnership between federal, state, and local governments. Established by an act of Congress in 1965 through the Appalachian Regional Development Act (ARDA), 40 U.S. Code §§ 14101–14704, ARC is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chairperson, who is appointed by the president of the United States. Local participation is also provided through multi-county local development districts (LDDs). ARC serves a 206,000-square-mile region of 26.4 million people that includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. To learn more about ARC’s strategic investment goals, objectives, and guiding principles visit arc.gov.

Session 1

SESSION 1: Introduction to the Course

- I. Welcome
- II. Course Overview
- III. Course Outcomes
- IV. Course Objectives
- V. Assignment

I. Welcome

Welcome to the Self-Paced Strategic Planning course for the *READY Nonprofits* Training Program. This course is designed to support nonprofit organizations in the Appalachian Region with emphasis on improving their internal capacities, which will help them leverage other resources to improve the quality of life and foster economic development in their surrounding communities.

II. Course Overview

The strategic planning course for nonprofit organizations is designed to provide participants with a thorough understanding of the principles and practices of strategic planning. Participants will learn how to conduct an environmental scan to assess internal and external factors affecting an organization, set strategic goals, and develop action plans for successful implementation.

This course includes five sessions with each session incorporating up to three modules. Each module provides content related to the course objectives and learning outcomes. We encourage you to explore the various reflection questions and assignments to help further your engagement with the course materials and direct application within your organizational environment. This course is designed to be completed sequentially by starting with session one and ending with session five. Each session's assignments and activities are built upon content covered in prior sessions. Throughout the materials there are questions to be used as a cue to pause and take notes or reflect in a manner and medium that best suits your learning style. Reflecting on application is key in extending learning and permeating the knowledge, tools, and practices throughout your organization.

III. Course Outcomes

Participants will learn how to lead and implement a strategic planning process that engages the board, staff, and the community to drive results.

IV. Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, participants will know how to do the following:

- Understand the importance of strategic planning to increase impact and fundraising.
- Understand the Balanced Scorecard model and rationale for use in holistic strategic planning.
- Identify core competencies and strategic elements (unique differentiators, target market, assess competitors).
- Assess organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT).
- Identify the data needed to evaluate current performance and potential future direction.
- Identify capacity-building priorities to attract and manage growth.
- Set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals to drive action and accountability.

V. Assignment

As you begin this course, please review the assignments within each session and complete them as you go. This will begin to provide you with the foundational information to move through the course content and apply the learning within your organization.

- Complete the organizational assessment to the best of your ability, prioritizing questions 1-10.
- Review your organization's vision, mission, and core values statements.
- Watch the assigned videos below.
 - Simon Sinek – How Great Leaders Inspire Action: [VIDEO LINK](#)
 - Simon Sinek – 3 Things that Make a Meaningful Vision: [VIDEO LINK](#)

Organizational Assessment

Complete this assessment to help identify important focus areas for developing and implementing your organization's strategic plan. You may not have the answer or know the answer to some questions. In that case, please put NA. Prioritize questions 1-10, and if you have time, review and complete additional questions.

1. What is our vision (the big change we want to make)?
2. What is our mission?
3. Who is our customer? (list them all)
4. What does the customer value?
5. What have been our results?
6. What is our plan?
7. What is our secret sauce? What sets us apart from others doing similar work?
8. What are our services?
9. What are the core values that guide our behavior and decision-making?
10. What is our current situation?
11. Who do we want to reach and engage in the process over the next three to five years?
12. Are we clear on the strategic priorities that will enable our organization to achieve our desired impact over the next several years?
13. Have we communicated our strategy clearly enough so that everyone within the organization understands where we are going, why, and how we will get there?
14. How is the strategy being implemented?
15. Given the organization's priorities, what decisions are truly critical?
16. Is it clear who is responsible (and has the authority) to make decisions?
17. Do we have the right people and capabilities to achieve our priorities, and do our people feel their goals and measures align with these priorities?
18. Have we defined the work processes and tools to enable our people to be effective as they address our top priorities?
19. What are our organizational strengths and weaknesses?
20. What are the viable opportunities available to us?
21. What near-term changes are required, no matter what the strategy is?
22. What transformational changes are needed to achieve the strategy?
23. What is most important right now?
24. What is ONE THING you would never change about our organization?
25. If you could change ONE THING to grow our organization, what would it be?
26. If you could eliminate ONE THING – a program, problem, or barrier - to fast-track our mission, what would it be?

Session 2

SESSION 2: Begin with the End in Mind

- I. Session Outcomes
- II. The Standards for Excellence
- III. Elements of a Strategic Plan
- IV. Mission, Vision, and Values
- V. The Balanced Score Card
- VI. Assignment

I. Session Outcomes

Session Outcomes

After this session, you will:

- Understand the strategic planning process.
- Explore your vision, mission, and values as your north star.
- Understand the balanced scorecard framework for strategic planning.

II. The Standards for Excellence

Standards For Excellence



Developed by the Standards for Excellence Institute

By implementing the performance benchmarks in the code, nonprofit organizations will meet the highest ethical standards for effective service in the public interest.



By following the guidelines outlined by the Standards for Excellence Institute, nonprofits can meet the challenges facing nonprofits and provide the highest quality service in the public interest.

- The Standards describe how nonprofits should act to be ethical and accountable in their program operations, governance, human resources, financial management, and fundraising.
- The Standards are based on 58 guiding principles.
- This is one set of standards, but there are others successfully used by nonprofits.

A. Standards for Excellence and the Five Pillars

Standards for Excellence and the Five Pillars

-  1. Mission, strategy, and evaluation
-  2. Leadership: Board, staff and volunteers
-  3. Legal compliance and ethics
-  4. Finance and operations
-  5. Resource development



The Standards for Excellence include several pillars. Some of the pillars are:

- 1. Mission, Strategy, and Evaluation:** Mission and impact, planning strategically, organizational evaluation, program evaluation, strategic partnerships
- 2. Leadership: Board, Staff, and Volunteers:** Leadership and governance, leadership and operational management, cultural competence
- 3. Legal Compliance and Ethics:** Maintaining legal compliance, required public disclosures, reporting misconduct and whistleblower protection, conflicts of interest, ethics
- 4. Finance and Operations:** Financial budgeting, reporting, and monitoring, internal controls and financial policies, personnel policies, administrative policies, risk management and insurance
- 5. Resource Development:** Resource plan, sources of income, fundraising, donor relations, acceptance of gifts, fundraising on behalf of the organization

While these are not the only models of best practices they reflect dominant industry trends. This course will provide an overview of the strategic planning process guided by industry accrediting agencies that set strategic and ethical standards. Your organization will want to right-size or customize the strategic planning process for your organization's size, budget, and organizational maturity.

Strategic planning aligned with the industry's best practices helps ensure an effective nonprofit sector. Standards of Excellence is a leading certifying agency.

III. Elements of a Strategic Plan



Elements of a Strategic Plan:



A. How Would You Describe Your Strategic Plan?

How would you describe your strategic plan?



- a) Plan? What plan?**
- b) Well, we have a plan started, but it never seems to be finalized.**
- c) Oh yeah, we have a 5year strategic plan sitting on that shelf collecting dust.**
- d) Yes. We have a plan and an annual planning process that drives meaningful discussion and decisions.**






Questions to consider:

What best describes your organization's relationship with its strategic plan?

When was the last time you looked at or referenced your strategic plan?


If your organization does not have a strategic plan, why not?

B. What is Strategic Planning?



What is Strategic Planning?

It is the process to set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, and ensure that employees and stakeholders are **working toward common goals and intended outcomes and results.**

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Strategic planning is the process of defining an organization's long-term goals and creating a roadmap of priorities, actions, and resource allocation to achieve them. It involves setting a vision for the future, determining what the organization does and for whom, and outlining how it will succeed by focusing on a sequence of activities to reach measurable outcomes. The result is a strategic plan that aligns stakeholders, guides daily actions, and provides a framework for responding to challenges and opportunities.

Defines direction: It establishes the organization's purpose and what it wants to accomplish in the long term.

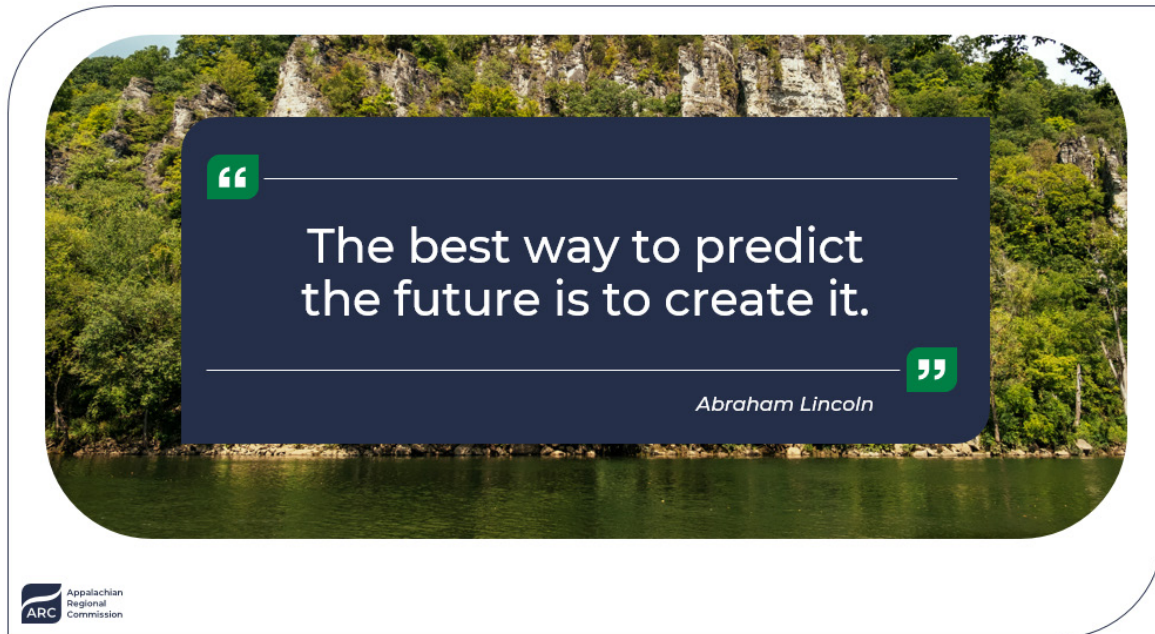
Sets goals and priorities: It helps leaders set goals, prioritize efforts, and define what success looks like.

Allocates resources: It guides how resources, such as capital and people, are allocated to achieve objectives.

Ensures alignment: It aligns all stakeholders and employees around a common set of goals.

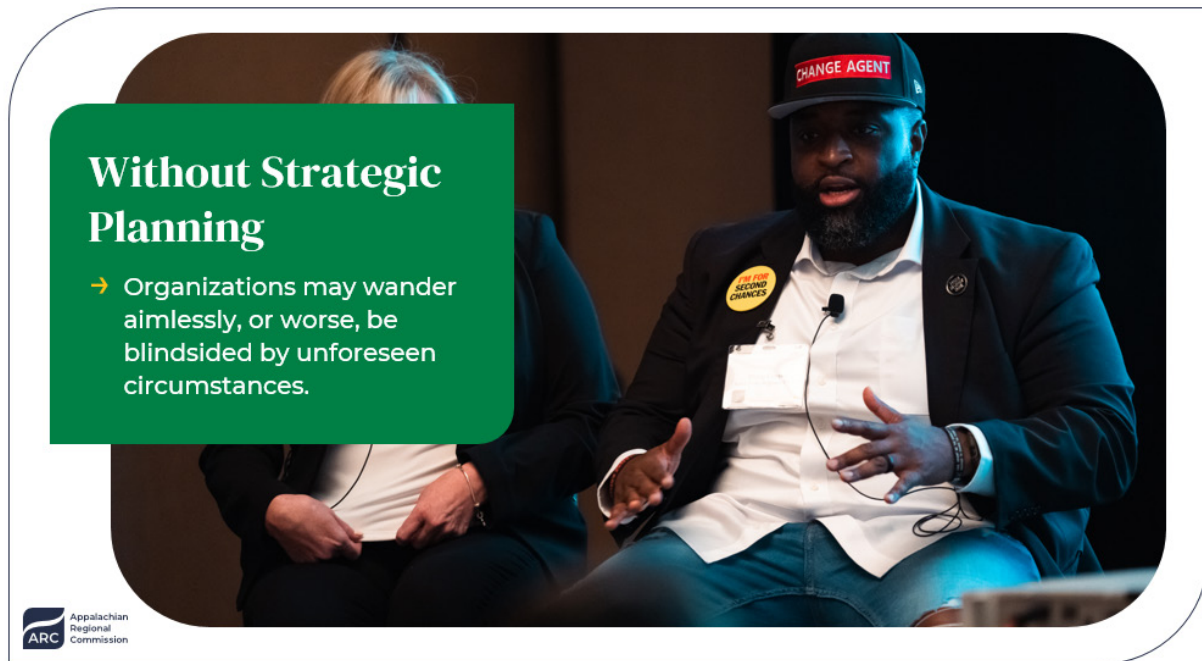
Guides action: It translates long-term vision into actionable strategies and a sequence of activities.

Promotes adaptability: It is an ongoing process that incorporates a regular review and adaptation in response to changing conditions.



Effective strategic planning ensures that everyone in the organization, from board presidents to volunteers and community supporters, understands what they need to do individually and collectively to move the mission forward.

C. Without Strategic Planning



Some organizations are proactive, actively working to address issues before they arise, while some organizations are reactive, reacting to problems as they arise.

Without a strategic plan, organizations will stay reactive rather than proactive in designing their future.

D. Key Characteristics of Strategically Unaligned Organizations

Misaligned organizations often exhibit characteristics like poor communication, inconsistent goals, and inefficient resource allocation, among other deficits. This can lead to a range of issues including low employee engagement, lack of clear direction, and stalled growth or profitability. Employees may feel unclear about their roles and how their work connects to the bigger picture, resulting in frustration and a lack of productivity.

Key Characteristics of Strategically Unaligned Organizations

- Poor communication
- Disjointed efforts
- Lack of accountability
- Inefficient resource allocation

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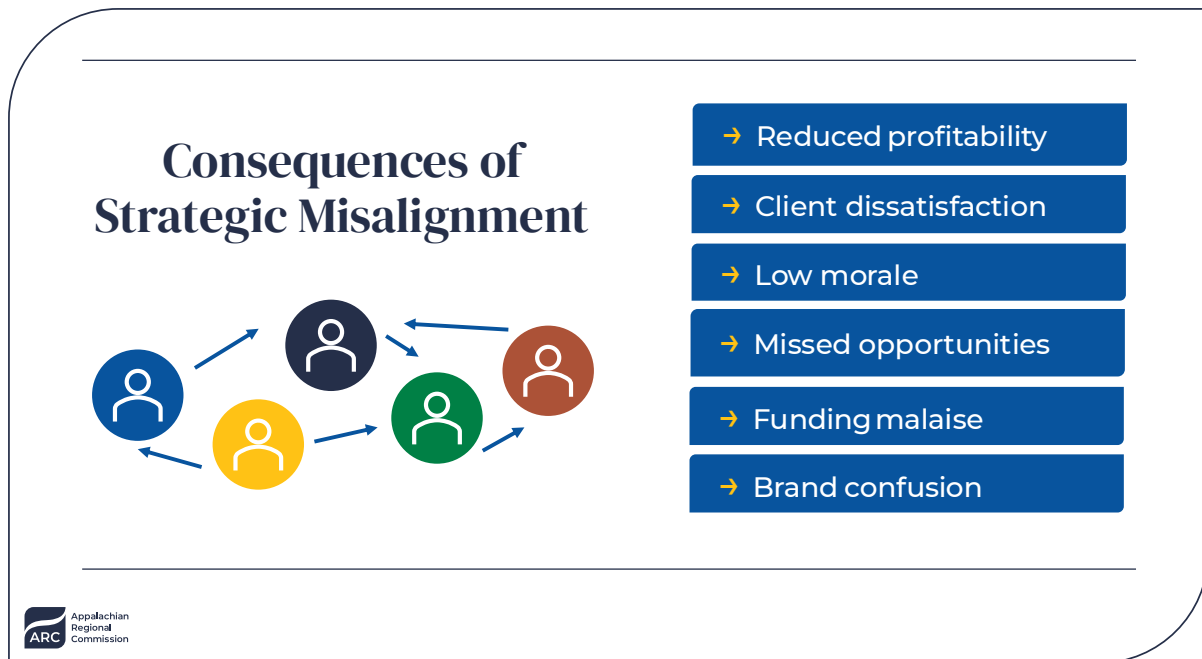
Poor communication: A lack of clear communication about the overall strategy and goals causes confusion and misinterpretations among employees.

Disjointed efforts: Individual teams may work on projects not connected to the larger strategic plan, leading to fragmented activity with little overall impact.

Lack of accountability: When teams are not aligned with the strategy, holding them accountable for achieving desired outcomes can be difficult.

Inefficient resource allocation: Resources may be wasted on projects that do not contribute to the overall strategic priorities.

E. Consequences of Strategic Misalignment



Reduced profitability: Inefficient operations and conflicting priorities can decrease revenue and profit margins.

Client dissatisfaction: Inconsistent messaging and service delivery can negatively impact customer experience.

Low morale: When employees don't believe that their work is contributing to a clear direction, it can decrease engagement and motivation.

Missed opportunities: A lack of alignment can prevent an organization from capitalizing on emerging market trends or new opportunities.

Funding malaise: Misaligned organizations can struggle in securing funding due to mission drift and poor strategic planning and the inability to address the most critical needs effectively.

Brand confusion: Without a codified strategy or internal consistency, messaging becomes fragmented with an incoherent brand identity both internally and externally.



Questions to consider:

Have you observed any of these consequences within your organization?

F. Key Characteristics of Strategically Aligned Organizations



An aligned organization is connected and unified with a clear strategy. Aligned organizations are ones in which all aspects of operations, including teams, departments, and processes, work toward the same strategic goal and are aligned with a clear strategy.

Unified vision: All employees understand the company's mission, vision, and key strategic priorities.

Collaborative effort: Different departments work together seamlessly to achieve shared goals, minimizing silos and redundancies.

Clear communication: Strategic plans are effectively communicated throughout the organization, ensuring everyone is on the same page.

Performance metrics: Measurable indicators are used to track progress toward strategic objectives and identify areas for improvement.



Questions to consider:

Have you experienced being in an aligned organization?

How does it feel to work in an aligned organization?

G. Benefits of Strategically Aligned Organizations

Aligned organizations benefit from improved efficiency, enhanced decision-making, improved employee engagement and retention, and a stronger competitive advantage. By ensuring all departments and employees are working toward common goals, organizations can experience optimized use of resources, increased collaboration, and higher overall performance of employees and the organization.

Key Characteristics of Strategically Aligned Organizations



Benefits of an aligned organization:

Improved efficiency: Focused efforts on key priorities lead to better resource allocation and productivity.


Enhanced decision-making: Alignment ensures decisions are made with the overall strategy in mind.

Stronger employee engagement: When employees understand the company's direction and their role in it, morale and motivation increase.


Increased market competitiveness: A well-aligned organization can adapt quickly to market changes and seize opportunities.

H. How Do We Become Aligned?

How Do We Become Aligned?



Strategic planning is essential to align your organization around a shared set of goals, objectives and priorities.



Organizations become aligned through strategic planning by first defining clear and shared goals and then ensuring all actions, from leadership to individual employees, are directed toward achieving them. Key steps include transparently communicating the strategy to everyone, linking individual performance to strategic objectives, and creating systems to monitor progress and adjust as needed.

1. Establish a clear and unified foundation.

Define a clear mission and vision: Ensure the entire organization understands the company's purpose (mission) and its aspirational future state (vision).

Set specific, measurable goals: Create objectives that are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to provide concrete targets.

Identify key priorities: Focus on the most important initiatives that will move the organization forward.

2. Develop a culture of communication and buy-in.

Communicate the strategy broadly: Make sure the strategy is communicated clearly and frequently to every stakeholder and level of the organization.

Involve employees and key stakeholders in the process: Engage employees and key stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process to increase their commitment.

Break down silos: Encourage open communication and collaboration between different departments to ensure a unified effort.

3. Align operations and performance.

Link individual goals to strategy: Connect employee performance goals directly to the organization's strategic objectives to ensure individual efforts contribute to the bigger picture.

Align resources and projects: Ensure that budgets, timelines, and project selections directly support the strategic goals.

Empower employees: Give employees the autonomy to make decisions and take ownership of their work within the strategic framework.

4. Monitor and adapt.

Track progress with key metrics: Use performance management systems and key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor progress toward strategic goals.

Encourage and model open dialogue and feedback: Create feedback loops where employees can share insights and raise concerns about strategic direction through multidirectional communication.

Continuously review and refine: Treat strategic alignment as an ongoing process, not a one-time project or event. Be prepared to adjust strategies based on performance and changing circumstances.

I. Strategic Planning Challenges

Common challenges of a strategic plan can include a lack of clear and actionable goals, poor communication and lack of buy-in, inadequate resource allocation, and treating the plan as a one-time event instead of an ongoing process. Other failures involve unrealistic expectations, a disconnect between the plan and the organization, and a lack of accountability for execution. The following statistics represent some of the challenges organizations have faced.

Strategic Planning Challenges

70%

→ of strategic plans do not get translated into execution.

51%

→ lack commitment to the goal.

87%

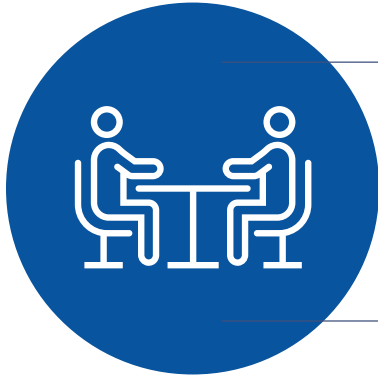
→ of people say they do not know what they should be doing to achieve the goal.



When investing in strategic planning, the goal is to build a framework and process that avoids these pitfalls and sets up your organization and team up for success. Being aware of the challenges related to strategic planning can help you proactively avoid them.

J. Using Consultants

Using Consultants



Is a consultant necessary?

How do you select a consultant?



A strategic planning consultant can be very helpful but is not necessary. As this course details the strategic planning process, you will be able to gain an overview of the process and investments needed to develop an effective plan for your organization. Each organization has different needs, staffing, resources, supports, structure, programs, and services that impact your ability and readiness for strategic planning.

Strategic planning involves conversations and decision-making that can result in significant changes within an organization. Consultants should be trained to expertly facilitate and support organizations through these strategic conversations and provide an impartial perspective that can be beneficial during the process.

Consultants can be helpful in the process to:

- Keep the planning on track and on budget.
- Provide an objective lens to gather and analyze data for stakeholder input.
- Bring expertise to the planning process.

When talking to consultants, make sure to consider:

- The team and the firm's capacity for the project
- How communications will be handled throughout the engagement process
- Crucial milestones to meet throughout the planning process
- The timeline
- The final product
- Rapport
- Your budget and plan requirements

K. Strategic Planning Steps

Key steps within the strategic planning process include: assess, analyze, prioritize, create, and monitor. First, assess your current state by analyzing internal and external factors, then analyze the data to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Next, prioritize objectives and goals based on this analysis to determine the most critical actions. After that, create a strategic plan, including specific actions and performance metrics, to guide the organization towards its objectives. Finally, monitor progress regularly, adjusting the plan as needed to address challenges and capitalize on new opportunities.

A Review: Strategic Planning Steps



Key steps in strategic planning include:

- Assessing the current business environment
- Performing a SWOT analysis
- Identifying organization goals and objectives
- Developing your strategic plan
- Monitoring performance and making adjustments as necessary

Assess



Analyze



Prioritize



Create



Monitor



1. Assess

Evaluate the current situation: Understand the organization's current business environment by examining internal and external factors.

Gather data: Collect data through methods like SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to understand internal capabilities and external market conditions.

Review vision and mission: Ensure your current position aligns with your core mission and vision or identify the need for revisions.

2. Analyze

Identify key issues: Use the data from the assessment phase to pinpoint the most critical challenges and opportunities.

Determine priorities: Based on the analysis, decide what is most important for the organization to focus on.

3. Prioritize

Set goals and objectives: Define clear, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals based on your priorities.

Rank objectives: Order your goals to determine which should be tackled first to maximize impact and align with your overall vision.

4. Create

Develop the strategic plan: Formulate a detailed action plan that outlines the steps needed to achieve your prioritized goals.

Assign responsibilities: Determine who is responsible for each action and the resources required to achieve related goals.

Establish metrics: Define key performance indicators (KPIs) and metrics to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and measure success.

5. Monitor

Track progress: Regularly review performance against your established key performance indicators and objectives.

Make adjustments: Be prepared to adapt the plan based on the results of your monitoring. This is a continuous cycle, so apply necessary changes back into the “Assess” and “Analyze” phases.

Communicate and align: Share updates on progress with stakeholders to ensure everyone remains aligned.

The graphic below provides a visual of the strategic planning process from the top down. The top of the pyramid represents the broadest strategic perspective (i.e., the aspirational vision of what your organization hopes to accomplish in the future). The bottom of the pyramid represents the granular perspective (i.e., where the programs, projects, and action plans are implemented). The graphic was developed by and used with permission from LBL Strategies and the Strategic Management Performance System.



The pyramid’s right side (royal blue) represents strategic elements corresponding to the left side’s (dark blue) actionable steps.

L. Include an Executive Summary

Strategic plans can be extensive documents that provide detailed information, goals, objectives, performance measures, timelines, and more. Providing an executive summary is essential so that stakeholders with limited time can quickly summarize the plan.



Start with an Executive Summary

This is an overview of the strategic plan and includes enough information for readers to understand the key points without reading the full plan.



-
- Mission, vision, and values
 - Problem statement and solution
 - Goals
 - Key initiatives
 - Evaluation
 - Expected outcomes
 - Key stakeholders
-

Recommendations for Executive Summaries:

- Mission, vision, and values
- Problem statement and solution
- Goals
- Key initiatives
- Evaluation
- Expected outcomes
- Key stakeholders



Questions to consider:

Is your organization ready?

It's important to see if your organization is ready when approaching strategic planning. Consider the following questions:


Do you have truly committed leaders?

Does your organization tend to be more adaptive/proactive or responsive/reactive?


Do you believe your organization exhibits flexibility and adaptability? Please describe.

Do you have a strong collaborative culture? Please describe.

IV. Mission, Vision, and Values



Mission, Vision, and Values



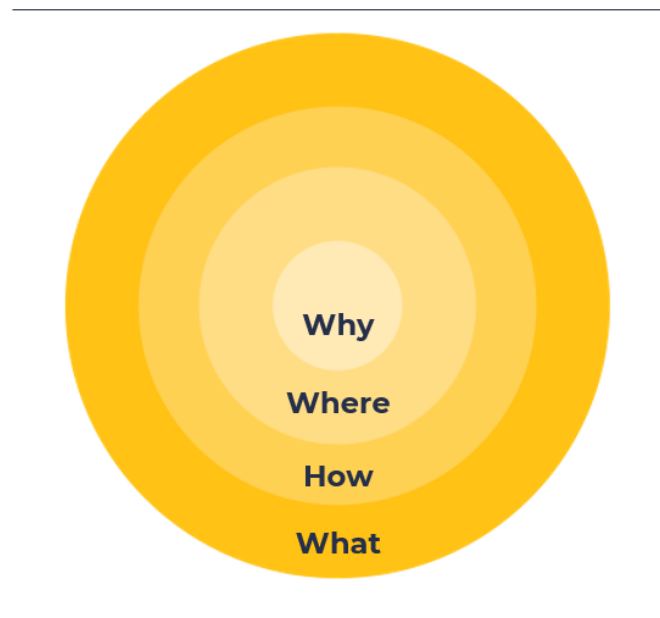
This portion of the session will focus on the importance of developing strong mission, vision, and values statements.

A. The Golden Circles: Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategy

The Golden Circles: Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategy

Why: Your mission
Where: Your vision
How: Your values
What: Your strategy

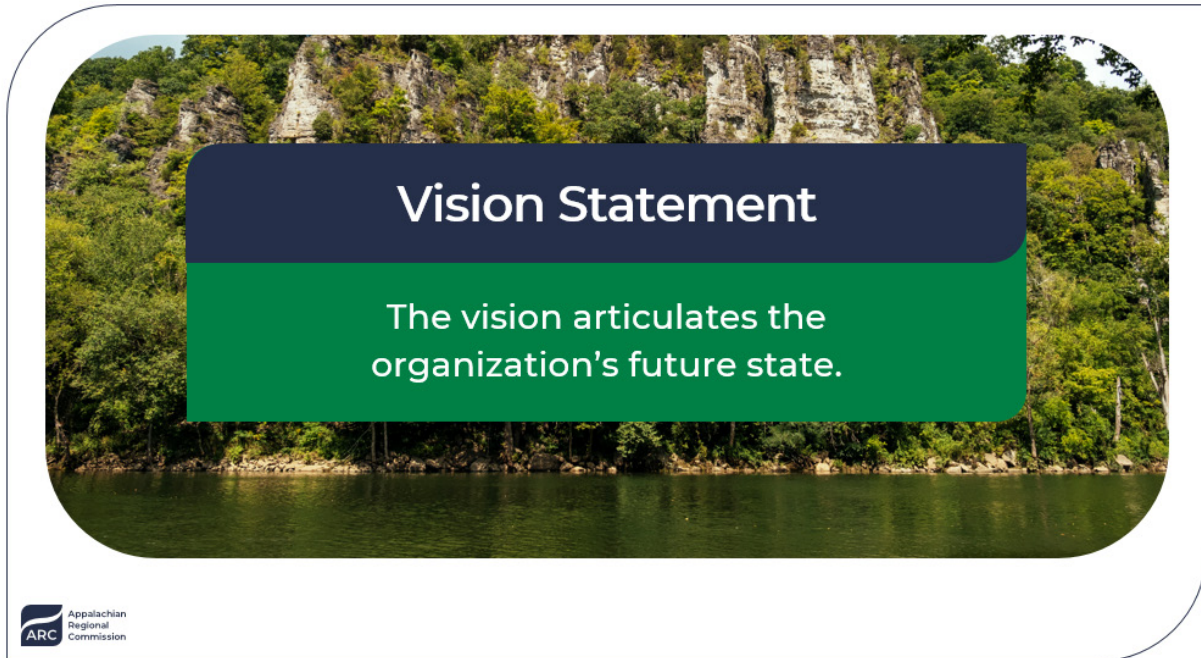
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The Golden Circles is a framework based on Simon Sinek's Golden Circle concept. When creating a strategic plan, you start by defining the "why," then move on to the "how," and finally the "what." In this course, we also discuss the "where" as the vision impacts the "how" and the "what."

Source: [The Golden Circle - Simon Sinek](#)

B. Vision Statement



A vision statement is a concise, thoughtful, and inclusive declaration of where the organization is headed and what it will look like when it arrives.

The vision articulates the organization's aspirational future state. It should reflect the significant change your organization wants to create for your community and the world.

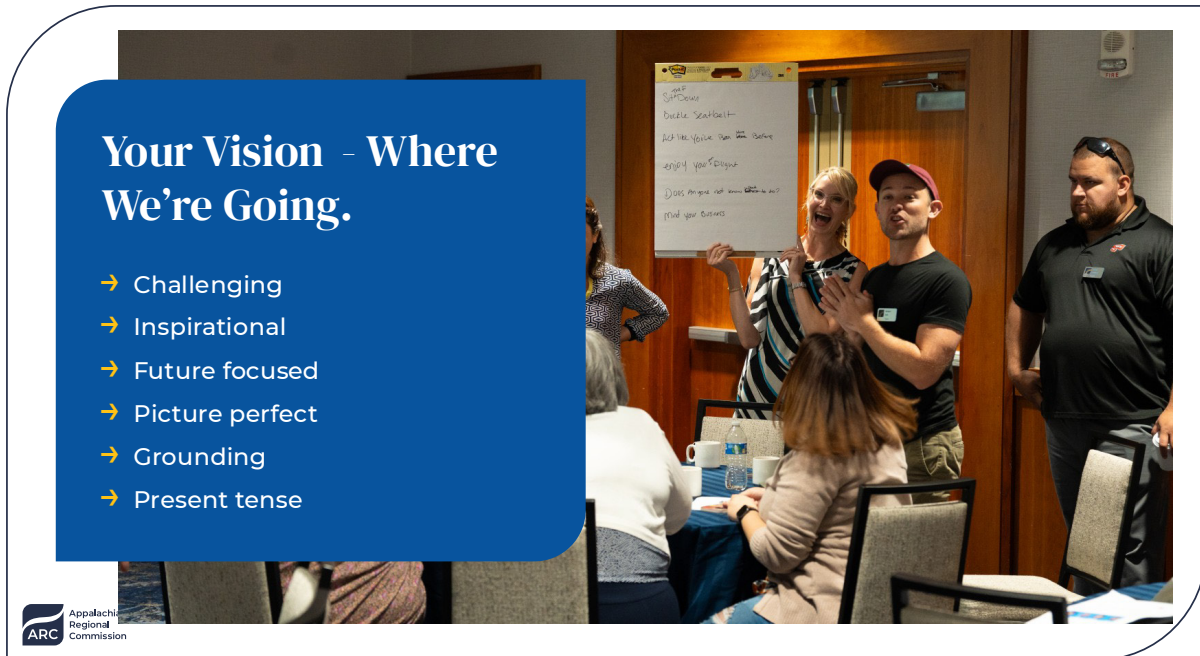


Questions to consider:

What do you hope our organization looks like in 5 to 10 years?

What challenges is your organization trying to solve?

C. Your Vision



Your vision statement:

- Challenging. Push your organization to move beyond its perceived limits.
- Inspirational. It touches the hearts and spirits of everyone inside and outside of the organization.
- Concise. Aim to keep your statement to 10 or fewer words.
- Future focused. Focus on a future your organization wants to help create.
- Picture perfect. Clearly describe the desired future state.
- Grounding. It's rooted in the WHY.
- Present tense. It's the significant change you want to make NOW.

Vision Statement Examples:

- Susan G. Komen for the Cure: **Cure Breast Cancer**
- Appalachian Regional Commission: **Appalachia is a region of great opportunity that will achieve socioeconomic parity with the nation.**

Vision Statement Questions

Many organizations have a mission statement, but not all have developed a vision statement or values. As you review, refresh, or develop your vision statement, start by asking yourself some key questions.



Questions to consider:

These questions can be discussed with your whole board or leadership team, but for now, please review and reflect on the following questions:

How does your organization define success?

What does the result look, feel, and sound like?

How is success measured?

How will the successful attainment of this future impact your clients, the community, and the world?

D. Your Mission

Your mission statement outlines the actions your organization is taking to advance its goals and move closer to its vision. It's your programs and services that are designed to create the change you seek for those you serve, whether it's creating new business opportunities or supporting individuals in substance use disorder recovery.



Mission Statement

The mission defines the organization's purpose, target population, and impact methodology.



Your Purpose - Your Mission - The WHY



- Is the organization's reason for existence
- Answers the question "Why?"
- Clarifies from your customer's perspective what business you are really in
- Offers a deep and noble sense of purpose
- Inspires excitement, commitment, and meaning



E. Focused Mission



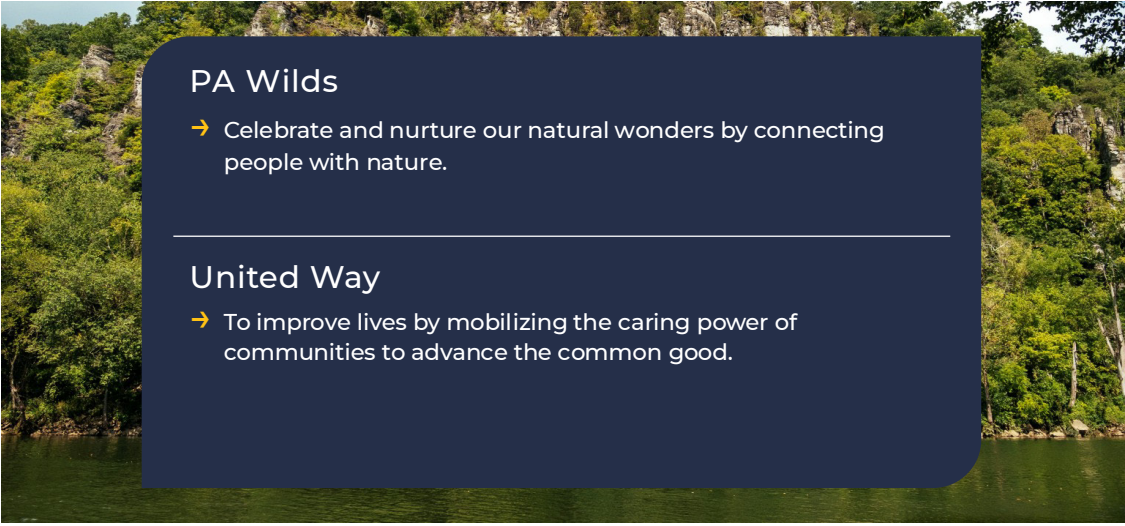
Your mission statement should be 15 words or less. A mission statement should not be a list of the services your organization provides, nor should it repeat the vision statement. A mission statement is a concise, actionable declaration defining an organization's purpose, target audience, and core values.

The mission gives the organization heart and answers these questions:

- Why does our work matter?
- What difference are we making in the world? Why would our supporters miss us if we ceased to exist?
- What do we do?
- How do we do it?
- What programs and services offered by our organization will help us move closer to attaining our vision?


F. Mission Statement Examples

Let's look at two example mission statements from two nonprofits:



PA Wilds
→ Celebrate and nurture our natural wonders by connecting people with nature.

United Way
→ To improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities to advance the common good.



G. Mission Statement Questions



Questions to consider:

Take some time to review and reflect on your mission statement.

Why do we exist?

Who are our customers and clients?

How are the services provided to customers and clients?


What benefits are provided to customers and clients?

What is the organization's core promise to its constituents?

- We help (who) _____
- to achieve (impact) _____
- by (doing/providing what) _____ (e.g., methodology, programs, services)


H. Core Values

Core Values



Deeply held convictions that reflect our attitude, behavior, and culture.

- Defines how people in an organization are expected to behave, how teams treat each other, and how you expect your organization to treat your customers.
- Provides a “should/should not” test for all behaviors and decisions.



Your values describe how you operate as an organization. They define what is most important to your organization, how employees are expected to behave, how teams treat each other, and how you expect your organization to treat your customers.

Core Values

These 3-5 value statements...

- Explain our fundamental philosophy.
- Reflect our beliefs and values.
- Guide the board, employees, and contractors in decision-making daily.
- Provide strategic direction and stability when implementing strategies.

CORE VALUES

Core values define what our organization stands for. They are at the core of our culture, behavior, and skills. Values are fundamental, enduring, and actionable. They drive priorities and decisions, and help determine how a company utilizes its resources.

When properly executed at the leadership level, core values play a fundamental role in attracting and retaining talented employees, making difficult decisions, prioritizing resources, reducing internal conflict, differentiating the brand, and attracting the right customers.

LET'S START TO DEFINE OUR CORE VALUES...

STEP 1: Mark the words that reflect your organization's values.

<input type="checkbox"/> Abundance	<input type="checkbox"/> Decisioniveness	<input type="checkbox"/> Joy	<input type="checkbox"/> Proactivity
<input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance	<input type="checkbox"/> Dedication	<input type="checkbox"/> Kindness	<input type="checkbox"/> Professionalism
<input type="checkbox"/> Accountability	<input type="checkbox"/> Dependability	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Functionality
<input type="checkbox"/> Achievement	<input type="checkbox"/> Diversity	<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/> Relationships
<input type="checkbox"/> Adventure	<input type="checkbox"/> Empathy	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning	<input type="checkbox"/> Reliability
<input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement	<input type="checkbox"/> Love	<input type="checkbox"/> Resilience
<input type="checkbox"/> Ambition	<input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiasm	<input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty	<input type="checkbox"/> Resourcefulness
<input type="checkbox"/> Appreciation	<input type="checkbox"/> Ethics	<input type="checkbox"/> Making a Difference	<input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility
<input type="checkbox"/> Attractiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellence	<input type="checkbox"/> Mindfulness	<input type="checkbox"/> Responsiveness
<input type="checkbox"/> Autonomy	<input type="checkbox"/> Expressiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivation	<input type="checkbox"/> Security
<input type="checkbox"/> Balance	<input type="checkbox"/> Fairness	<input type="checkbox"/> Optimism	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-Control
<input type="checkbox"/> Being the Best	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	<input type="checkbox"/> Open-Mindedness	<input type="checkbox"/> Selflessness
<input type="checkbox"/> Benevolence	<input type="checkbox"/> Friendships	<input type="checkbox"/> Originality	<input type="checkbox"/> Simplicity
<input type="checkbox"/> Boldness	<input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility	<input type="checkbox"/> Passion	<input type="checkbox"/> Stability
<input type="checkbox"/> Brilliance	<input type="checkbox"/> Freedom	<input type="checkbox"/> Performance	<input type="checkbox"/> Success
<input type="checkbox"/> Calmness	<input type="checkbox"/> Fun	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork
<input type="checkbox"/> Caring	<input type="checkbox"/> Generosity	<input type="checkbox"/> Proactive	<input type="checkbox"/> Thankfulness
<input type="checkbox"/> Challenge	<input type="checkbox"/> Grace	<input type="checkbox"/> Professionalism	<input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtfulness
<input type="checkbox"/> Charity	<input type="checkbox"/> Growth	<input type="checkbox"/> Quality	<input type="checkbox"/> Traditionalism
<input type="checkbox"/> Cheerfulness	<input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility	<input type="checkbox"/> Recognition	<input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthiness
<input type="checkbox"/> Cleverness	<input type="checkbox"/> Happiness	<input type="checkbox"/> Risk Taking	<input type="checkbox"/> Understanding
<input type="checkbox"/> Community	<input type="checkbox"/> Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Safety	<input type="checkbox"/> Uniqueness
<input type="checkbox"/> Commitment	<input type="checkbox"/> Honesty	<input type="checkbox"/> Security	<input type="checkbox"/> Usefulness
<input type="checkbox"/> Compassion	<input type="checkbox"/> Humility	<input type="checkbox"/> Service	<input type="checkbox"/> Versatility
<input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation	<input type="checkbox"/> Humor	<input type="checkbox"/> Spirituality	<input type="checkbox"/> Vision
<input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration	<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> Stability	<input type="checkbox"/> Warmth
<input type="checkbox"/> Consistency	<input type="checkbox"/> Independence	<input type="checkbox"/> Peace	<input type="checkbox"/> Wealth
<input type="checkbox"/> Contribution	<input type="checkbox"/> Individuality	<input type="checkbox"/> Perfection	<input type="checkbox"/> Well-Being
<input type="checkbox"/> Creativity	<input type="checkbox"/> Innovation	<input type="checkbox"/> Playfulness	<input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom
<input type="checkbox"/> Credibility	<input type="checkbox"/> Inspiration	<input type="checkbox"/> Popularity	<input type="checkbox"/> Zeal
<input type="checkbox"/> Curiosity	<input type="checkbox"/> Intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/> Power	
<input type="checkbox"/> Daring	<input type="checkbox"/> Intuition	<input type="checkbox"/> Preparedness	



CORE VALUES

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When properly executed at the leadership level, core values play a fundamental role in attracting and retaining talented employees, making difficult decisions, prioritizing resources, reducing internal conflict, differentiating the brand, and attracting the right customers.

LET'S START TO DEFINE OUR CORE VALUES...

STEP 1: Mark the words that reflect your organization's values.

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance | <input type="checkbox"/> Dedication | <input type="checkbox"/> Kindness | <input type="checkbox"/> Professionalism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountability | <input type="checkbox"/> Dependability | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge | <input type="checkbox"/> Punctuality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Achievement | <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adventure | <input type="checkbox"/> Empathy | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Reliability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement | <input type="checkbox"/> Love | <input type="checkbox"/> Resilience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ambition | <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiasm | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty | <input type="checkbox"/> Resourcefulness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciation | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics | <input type="checkbox"/> Making a Difference | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attractiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> Excellence | <input type="checkbox"/> Mindfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsiveness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Autonomy | <input type="checkbox"/> Expressiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivation | <input type="checkbox"/> Security |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Balance | <input type="checkbox"/> Fairness | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimism | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Control |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being the Best | <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> Open-Mindedness | <input type="checkbox"/> Selflessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benevolence | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendships | <input type="checkbox"/> Originality | <input type="checkbox"/> Simplicity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boldness | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Passion | <input type="checkbox"/> Stability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brilliance | <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom | <input type="checkbox"/> Performance | <input type="checkbox"/> Success |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calmness | <input type="checkbox"/> Fun | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caring | <input type="checkbox"/> Generosity | <input type="checkbox"/> Proactive | <input type="checkbox"/> Thankfulness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge | <input type="checkbox"/> Grace | <input type="checkbox"/> Professionalism | <input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtfulness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charity | <input type="checkbox"/> Growth | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality | <input type="checkbox"/> Traditionalism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Recognition | <input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleverness | <input type="checkbox"/> Happiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Risk Taking | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community | <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety | <input type="checkbox"/> Uniqueness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment | <input type="checkbox"/> Honesty | <input type="checkbox"/> Security | <input type="checkbox"/> Usefulness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compassion | <input type="checkbox"/> Humility | <input type="checkbox"/> Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Versatility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation | <input type="checkbox"/> Humor | <input type="checkbox"/> Spirituality | <input type="checkbox"/> Vision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration | <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> Stability | <input type="checkbox"/> Warmth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consistency | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence | <input type="checkbox"/> Peace | <input type="checkbox"/> Wealth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contribution | <input type="checkbox"/> Individuality | <input type="checkbox"/> Perfection | <input type="checkbox"/> Well-Being |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity | <input type="checkbox"/> Innovation | <input type="checkbox"/> Playfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Credibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Inspiration | <input type="checkbox"/> Popularity | <input type="checkbox"/> Zeal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curiosity | <input type="checkbox"/> Intelligence | <input type="checkbox"/> Power | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daring | <input type="checkbox"/> Intuition | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparedness | |

Core values are key elements to developing your strategic plan. These include short statements of your organization's foundational philosophy.

These statements should explicitly lay out the beliefs and values of your organization.

These statements should help employees and contractors in the daily decision-making process.

Your values are your foundation for strategic direction and provide stability and a guide to your process of strategic planning.

An example of organizational values is shared below.

Example – Volunteers of America – Teamwork, Accountability, Communication, and Customer Service

Teamwork: Together, as a team, we can achieve what individuals cannot. Our individual strengths energize our joint efforts to improve the lives of the people we serve.

We are richer and stronger because of our diversity, and we promote an environment that offers dignity, understanding, and compassion in order to reach and empower all.

Accountability: We hold ourselves personally and collectively responsible to do right and adhere to ethical principles in an environment of openness and honesty.

Communication: We are committed to the timely and transparent exchange of information and ideas and encourage respectful interaction through listening, understanding, and assumption of positive intent.

Customer Service: We strive for the highest standards in all we do and seek continuous improvement through feedback from our partners and those we serve.



Core Values Exercise

Core values define what our organization stands for. They are at the core of your culture, behavior, and skills. Values are fundamental, enduring, and actionable. They drive priorities and decisions and help determine how a company utilizes its resources.

When properly executed at the leadership level, core values play a fundamental role in attracting and retaining talented employees, making difficult decisions, prioritizing resources, reducing internal conflict, differentiating the brand, and attracting the right customers.

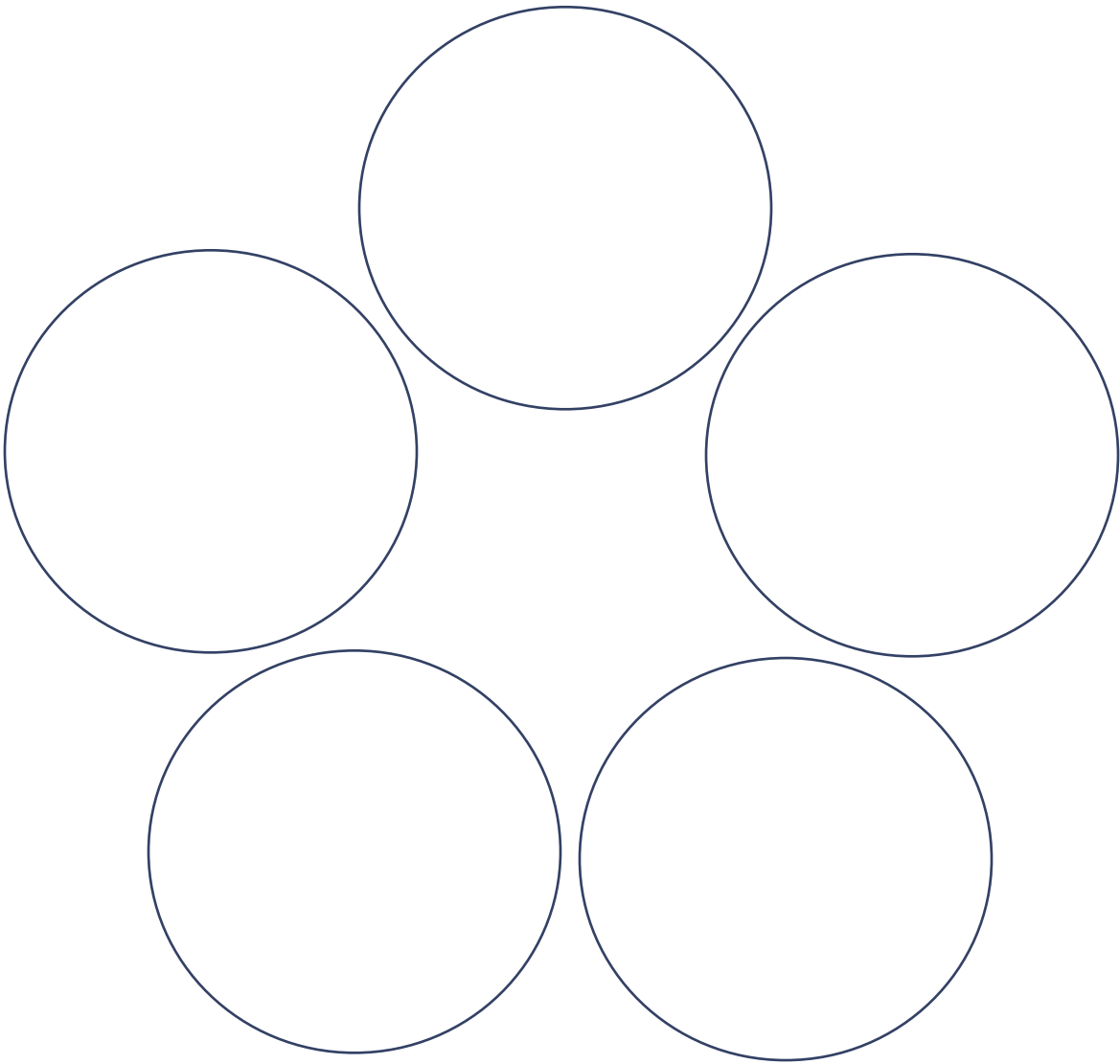
As you review or create your organization's core values, these should be reflective of your beliefs and values, help to guide decision-making, and provide direction for your long-term strategy. Core values should be no more than 3-5 statements that are memorable. Use the exercise below to help define or refine your core values. Share the Core Values Exercise with others within your organization. Once the sheets have been completed, you will combine all responses into one master list.

STEP 1: Mark the words that reflect your organization's values.

X	Example				
	Abundance		Acceptance		Accountability
	Adventure		Advocacy		Achievement
	Attractiveness		Ambition		Appreciation
	Benevolence		Autonomy		Balance
	Caring		Brilliance		Being the Best
	Cleverness		Boldness		Calmness
	Cooperation		Challenge		Charity
	Creativity		Community		Cheerfulness
	Decisiveness		Collaboration		Commitment
	Empathy		Consistency		Compassion
	Excellence		Credibility		Contribution
	Friendships		Dedication		Daring
	Honesty		Encouragement		Dependability
	Independence		Expressiveness		Diversity
	Intelligence		Flexibility		Enthusiasm
	Knowledge		Humility		Ethics
	Loyalty		Individuality		Family
	Optimism		Intuition		Health
	Performance		Leadership		Happiness
	Quality		Making a Difference		Humor
	Security		Open-Mindedness		Inclusiveness
	Peace		Personal Development		Innovation
	Power		Recognition		Inspiration
	Punctuality		Service		Kindness
	Resourcefulness		Perfection		Love
	Self-Control		Preparedness		Motivation
	Success		Relationships		Originality
	Traditionalism		Responsibility		Proactive
	Usefulness		Responsiveness		Risk Taking
	Wealth		Resilience		Spirituality
			Security		Playfulness
			Stability		Proactivity
			Popularity		Reliability
			Professionalism		Responsiveness
			Thoughtfulness		Simplicity
			Uniqueness		Thankfulness
			Warmth		Understanding
			Zeal		Vision
					Wisdom

STEP 2: Combine all lists into one master list and then use that list to categorize the values into no more than 5 circles.

VALUES GROUPS



ACTIONABLE VALUES

V. The Balanced Scorecard



The Balanced Scorecard



A. What is The Balanced Scorecard?

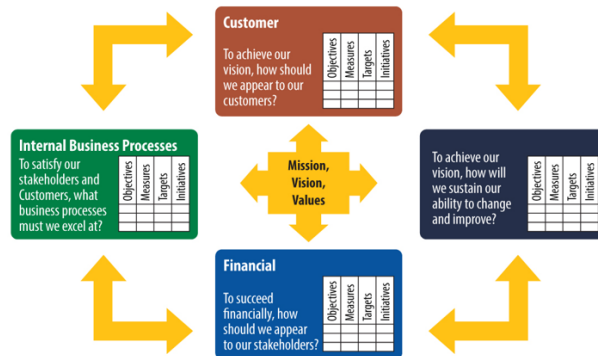
The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is a strategic planning and management system developed by Robert Kaplan and David Norton in the 1990s.

A balanced scorecard examines strategic measures and traditional financial measures to get a more “balanced” view of an organization’s performance. The balanced scorecard is a holistic system for managing strategy. A key benefit of using a disciplined framework is that it gives organizations a way to “connect the dots” between the various components of strategic planning and management.

Balanced Scorecard

Organizations use BSCs to:

- Communicate what they are trying to accomplish.
- Align the day-to-day work that everyone is doing with strategy.
- Prioritize projects, products, and services.
- Measure and monitor progress toward strategic targets.

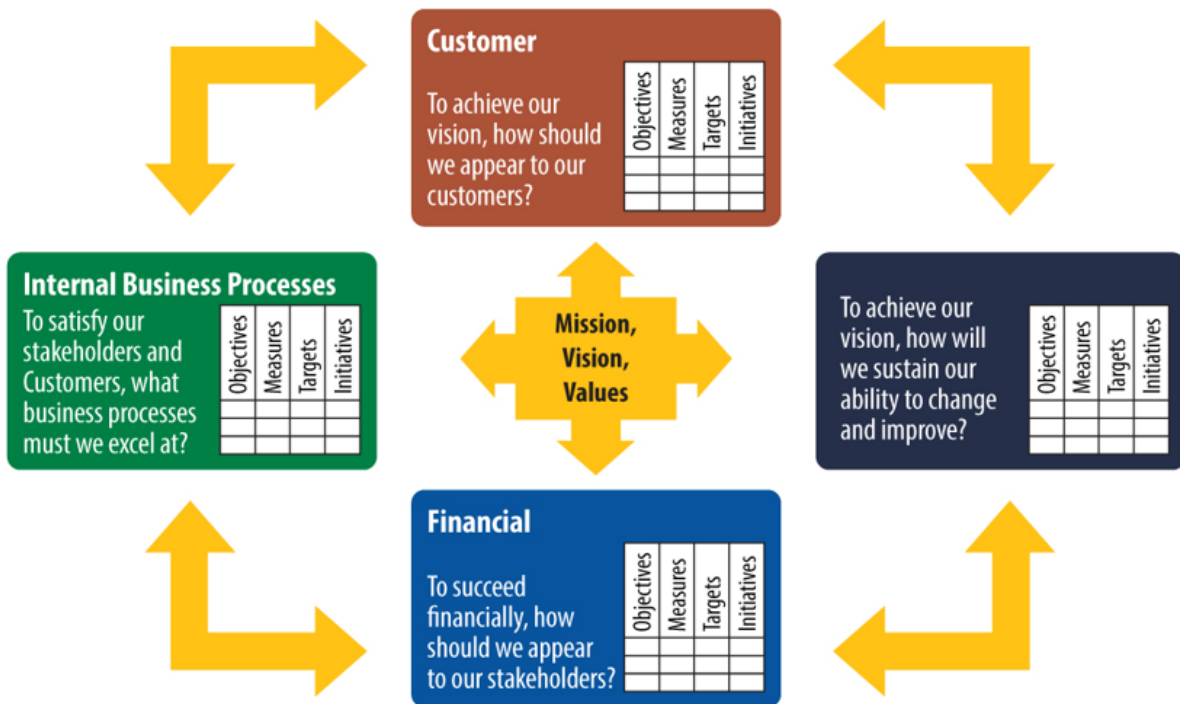


Organizations use BSCs to:

- Communicate what they are trying to accomplish.
- Align the day-to-day work that everyone is doing with strategy.
- Prioritize projects, products, and services.
- Measure and monitor progress toward strategic targets.

The BSC allows organizations to analyze and report performance in areas related to customers/services, financial sustainability, internal processes/employee engagement, and organizational capacity building and governance.

It helps organizations align their strategy with their performance to include performance objectives, measures, targets, and initiatives.



B. Building Goals and Objectives

Putting it Together to Build Goals and Objectives

Identify goals and objectives to meet these challenges and address the needs outlined in the strategic plan.


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A strategic plan is a series of cascading goals and milestones of accountability. What makes a strategic plan come to life is the **why** behind the goals and priorities. How

do we determine these priorities, and then how do we maintain focus on these priorities? Let's put these components together as your organization begins to build out the goals, objectives, and initiatives of your strategic plan.

C. Strategic Goals

Strategic goals are the longer-term directional themes, or overarching strategic priorities, to be achieved in accordance with the organization's vision and mission. Goals energize, direct, and motivate an organization and its stakeholders and are more narrowly focused than the vision and mission statements.



Strategic Goals

GOALS: A goal is a longer-term directional theme that aims to be achieved in accordance with the organization's vision and mission.

EXAMPLES:

- Improve employee retention
- Diversify fundraising revenue

ARC Appalachian Regional Commission




Questions to Consider:

What are some examples of goals your organization may include in its strategic plan?

D. Objectives

A common area of misunderstanding within strategic planning is the difference between goals and objectives. Goals are the outcome and the desired result your organization would like to achieve.



Objectives

- Objectives are specific, actionable, measurable, and time-bound steps that break down strategy into smaller components.
- We must implement these actions in our daily activities to improve our strategies.

ARC Appalachian Regional Commission

Objectives are specific, actionable, measurable, and time-bound steps that help your organization reach the established goals. The goals are the destination, and the objectives are the individual steps on the map to get there.

Feature	Goals	Objectives
Scope	Broad and general	Narrow and specific
Measurability	May or may not be measurable	Always measurable and quantifiable
Timeframe	Long-term, without a specific deadline	Short-term, with a defined due date

Purpose	State the desired end result or outcome	Detail the specific actions needed to achieve the goal
Example	Boost customer satisfaction	Increase customer satisfaction scores by 15% within the next 12 months



Questions to Consider:

What are some objectives we can do in our daily work that help us achieve these longer-term goals?

E. Strategic Initiatives

A strategic initiative is a plan or project-based effort an organization undertakes to achieve its high-level, long-term goals. It's the "how" that translates an organization's vision into action, often involving a series of coordinated projects and activities across different departments to achieve specific outcomes, such as entering a new market or improving operational efficiency. Without this disciplined focus, organizations struggle to execute their strategy.



Strategic Initiatives Are:

- Projects, tasks, and activities critical to the success of your project
- Focused on the execution of the highest priority projects
- Necessary for organizations to execute strategy



Key Components of Strategic Initiatives

Goal-oriented: Initiatives are designed to fulfill a specific, long-term organizational strategy. If a goal is to "increase profits," a strategic initiative might be "launching a social media campaign to target new demographics."

Actionable: They are a set of actionable steps and coordinated activities, rather than just a high-level idea.

Measurable: They are often supported by key performance indicators (KPIs) and have clear deadlines and milestones to measure progress.

Cross-functional: While some initiatives may be focused, many are large and complex, requiring coordination and resources from multiple departments or teams.

Transformative: They are designed to drive significant changes and impact, such as creating new revenue streams, improving efficiency, or gaining a competitive edge.

Assignment

- Research three comparable organizations to yours in the same business sector, identifying their vision, mission statements, and core values if available, and review.
- Create a draft of your organization's revised vision, mission, and core values statement. Or, if your vision, mission, and core values do not need to be revised, identify why you feel they continue to effectively guide your organization.
- Please watch the following videos:
 - **Simon Sinek _ How Great Leaders Inspire Action:** [VIDEO LINK](#)
 - **Peter Drucker's Five Questions:** [VIDEO LINK](#)
 - **Simon Sinek – 3 Things that Make a Meaningful Vision:** [VIDEO LINK](#)
 - **On Strategy – Developing a Mission Statement:** [VIDEO LINK](#)
 - **On Strategy – How to write a Vision Statement:** [VIDEO LINK](#)

Session 3

SESSION 3: Assessment and Data Collection

- I. Session Outcomes
- II. Assignment Review
- III. Data Gathering Techniques
- IV. Performing a Competitive Analysis
- V. Performing a SWOT Analysis
- VI. Strategic Themes
- VII. Assignment

I. Session Outcomes

Session Outcomes

After this session, you'll understand:

- Why data collection is key
- Different kinds of data
- How to develop a SWOT analysis



II. Assignment Review

Before moving into new content within Session 3, this session begins with reflection on the assignments from Sessions 1 and 2. Make notes of action items your organization should consider before you begin to develop your strategic plan.

Last session, you were asked to do the following:

- Research three comparative organizations in the same business sector and review their vision, mission, and organizational values.
- Watch the assigned videos.



Questions to Consider:

What did you learn?

Did you review or revise your vision, mission, or values statements? What resonates? Is it accurate and comprehensive? Is it brief?

If you drafted or revised your vision, mission, or values, did you share your drafts with anyone in or outside of your organization? What feedback did you receive?

III. Data Gathering Techniques



Data Gathering Techniques



A. Data Collection

Data collection in strategic planning involves gathering relevant information—through surveys, interviews, market research, and other methods—to understand the organization’s current state, identify opportunities, and clarify goals. By analyzing this information, organizations can make informed decisions, track progress, and ensure their strategies are grounded in reality. Effective data collection considers both internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) to create a comprehensive foundation for strategic decision-making.



Data Collection

Is an integral part of any strategic plan process to identify key strategic themes and priorities to move the organization forward.



What is data collection?

- Data collection is an integral part of any strategic plan because it informs the plan's development.
- It ensures that various internal and external stakeholders are engaged and have meaningful opportunities to share their perspectives.

Why Data Collection?



- Establishes baseline and benchmarks
- Informs development of the plan
- Engages stakeholders
- Keeps us honest
- Helps us prioritize
- Validates or challenges our "gut"



Data Collection:

- Helps organizations know where they currently stand and guides where they need to go
- Develops a shared view of what is impacting the organization
- Validates our ideas, helps us prioritize, and keeps everyone on the same page

Baselines and benchmarks:

- Baselines establish where you are now.
- Benchmarks compare your performance to industry standards.

Steps for Effective Data Collection

Define objectives: Clearly identify the specific issues and opportunities you need information on and set goals for what the data should help you achieve.

Plan the approach: Choose the most appropriate data collection methods based on your objectives, timeline, budget, and available resources.

Develop instruments: Create tools like questionnaires, interview guides, or checklists. It is helpful to pre-test these tools to identify any issues.

Implement and collect: Train data collectors, gather the data, and be prepared to adapt to unforeseen circumstances while maintaining data quality.

Analyze and act: Analyze the collected data. Use the findings to strategically guide actions toward optimizing your organization's performance.

B. Environmental Scan



Environmental Scan

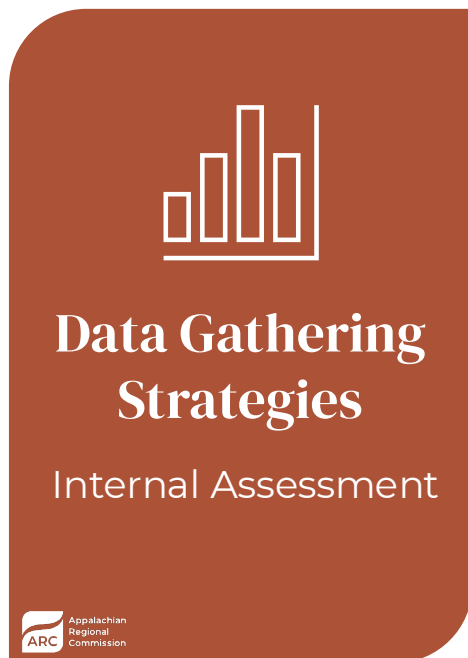
- Internal assessment of the organization to determine strengths and weaknesses
- External assessment of the industry landscape to identify opportunities and threats

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Data collection is a systematic process of examining and analyzing both internal and external factors that could potentially impact an organization, project, or community. It allows for informed decision-making by identifying potential opportunities and threats within the surrounding environment.

An environmental scan is a strategic planning process that involves gathering information about both the internal and external factors that could affect an organization's future, including economic, social, and technological trends. This scan helps organizations identify potential opportunities and threats to inform future decision-making, develop strategies, and maintain their long-term viability.

C. Data Gathering Strategies



-
- **Document and policy reviews**
 - **Operational efficiency**
 - **Human resources**
 - **Financial performance**
 - **Governance procedures**
 - **Program outcomes and outputs**
 - **Fundraising performance**
 - **Organizational culture**
-

There are two primary data types you'll rely on for your data gathering: internal and external.

Internal data includes data (documents, processes, systems, etc.) unique to your organization, and can include collecting and reviewing:

- Policies
- Standard operating procedures
- Operational efficiency data
- Production process efficiency metrics
- Inventory management
- Quality control systems
- Human resources
- Employee morale and satisfaction
- Staff training and development programs
- Employee turnover rate
- Level of expertise and skills within the staff
- Financial performance (e.g., net income, return on investment, cash flow)
- Profitability margins
- Cash flow
- Debt levels
- Cost structure
- Systems used to measure and track your financial systems

- Governance procedures
- Technology and innovation
- Current technology infrastructure
- Program outcomes and outputs
- Branding and visual assets
- Brand awareness and target audience reach
- Reputation
- Communication channels and transparency, both internal and external
- Fundraising performance
- Organizational culture
- Leadership style and decision-making processes
- Employee engagement and motivation

D. Organizational Assessment

An organizational assessment is an important internal tool for strategic planning. When team members complete an organizational assessment like the tool shared below, the organization gains insight into its performance, emerging needs, and areas of opportunity from the perspective of the employees. These insights help determine which key areas should be examined more deeply through other data-collection approaches.



Exercise – Organizational Assessment Questionnaire

Peter Drucker has developed several useful tools to help organizational leaders switch from a more reactive approach to a more proactive approach in their business leadership.

According to Peter Drucker, the organizational assessment is based on six key questions.

- What is our vision?
- What is our mission?
- Who is our customer?
- What does the customer value?
- What are our results?
- What is our plan?



Questions to Consider:

In Session 1 you were assigned the Organizational Assessment to complete, prioritizing questions 1 – 10. What questions were difficult to answer?

What questions were easy to answer?

What clarity did you have when completing the assessment? Did areas that need focus in your organization's strategic plan begin to come to focus? If so, which areas?

For reference, the full Organizational Assessment questions are listed below.

Full Organizational Assessment Questions

1. Why does the organization exist?
2. What is our mission?
3. What are the core values that guide our behavior and decision-making?
4. What service are offered?
5. Who is our customer?
6. What does the customer value?
7. What is our current situation?
8. What problems do we want to solve?
9. What do we want to improve?
10. Whom do we want to reach over the next three to five years?
11. Are we clear on the strategic priorities that will enable our organization to achieve our desired impact over the next several years?
12. Have we communicated our strategy clearly enough that everyone within the organization understands where we are going, why, and how we will get there?

13. Do we have a plan to achieve your strategy?
14. How is the strategy being implemented?
15. Given the organization's priorities, what decisions are truly critical?
16. Is it clear who is responsible (and has the authority) to make decisions?
17. Who in our organization must work closely together to achieve these priorities, and does our structure enable them to do so?
18. Do we have the right people and capabilities to achieve our priorities, and do our people feel their goals and measures align with these priorities?
19. Have we defined the work processes and tools to enable our people to be effective as they address your top priorities?
20. What are our organizational strengths and weaknesses?
21. What are the viable opportunities available to us?
22. What options do current capabilities support?
23. What near-term changes are required, no matter what the strategy is?
24. What transformational changes are needed to achieve the strategy?
25. What are our results?
26. Who must do what to improve our performance results?
27. What is most important right now?

E. Types of Participatory Data Collection



Participatory data collection is an approach that actively involves the people who are directly connected to the issues being explored. Instead of relying on traditional, top-down data extraction, it uses a co-creation model where key stakeholders serve

as partners throughout the entire process—from shaping the questions to interpreting the findings and applying the results. This method amplifies the voices of those with lived experience, strengthens the relevance and accuracy of the data, and supports solutions that are actionable and aligned with the people or communities you serve.

Participatory data collection engages key stakeholder groups including employees, donors, constituents, clients, partners, funders and other audiences that are relevant to your organization.



Questions to Consider:

Who are your organization’s stakeholders? Who are the people, positions, roles, partners, etc. that your organization serves or relies on for support?

Who you from your organization would you select to interview to obtain their honest opinion of your mission, operations, systems, leadership, and impact? Why this person?

Brainstorm a list of people, organizations, and perspectives your organization may include in its strategic planning process. Which people/groups would be easier to engage in the process, and which would be more challenging to engage?

F. Focus Groups

A focus group is a data collection method where a small group of 6–12 people with similar characteristics discuss a specific topic under a facilitator's guidance. The goal is to gather in-depth insights, opinions, and perceptions through group interaction, which can spark new ideas that might not emerge in one-on-one interviews. The data is typically transcribed verbatim and then analyzed for themes.



Focus Groups

Focus groups obtain valuable information and create engagement with the planning process. You can do focus groups with the following:

- Staff
- Supervisors and managers
- Clients
- Family members
- Community members



A focus group follows a set of questions in which the attendees can provide feedback and allow for deeper discussion around specific topics or areas.

Key Aspects of a Focus Group

Participant selection: Participants are chosen based on shared characteristics relevant to the research question, such as age, gender, or experience with a program, service, community or other area.

Consent to participate: A focus group consent form is a vital ethical and legal document that ensures participants understand the purpose, procedures, risks, and confidentiality limitations of participating in a focus group before volunteering. It documents voluntary agreement, protects researcher liability, and informs participants of data recording (audio/video) and how their information will be used. A signed consent form should be received prior to participation.

Facilitator's role: A trained moderator guides the discussion with a set of open-ended questions but remains flexible to encourage spontaneous conversation and explore unexpected insights.

Group dynamics: The interaction between participants is crucial. Ideas bounce off one another, and the group setting allows for a diversity of viewpoints and can reveal the "why" behind certain attitudes or behaviors.

Data recording: The discussion is captured via notetaking or in some cases recorded (with permission) and then transcribed.

Data analysis: The transcripts are analyzed for themes, patterns, and key ideas.

Time and size: A typical session lasts 90 minutes to reach a point of saturation where new information is no longer emerging.

In alignment with best practices, focus groups should include the following. In addition to the list below, research institutions and universities can be a helpful resource to identify detailed recommendations and practices related to focus groups.

- Clear communication from the moderator about the goal(s) of the focus group and how the data will be used (e.g., aggregating info into themes)
- Nonjudgmental discussions; framing moderator questions in a neutral, objective manner
- A safe, quiet environment free from distractions to facilitate the conversation
- A forum with ample opportunities for all participants to engage
- Reminders about confidentiality (i.e., not associating comments to a particular person in the report and requesting participants not disclose the conversation outside the session)
- Moderators who are knowledgeable about how to politely and respectfully re-focus conversations that veer too far away from the goals of the focus group
- Establish norms early. For example, only one person speaks at a time, respect all opinions, and confirm that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed but is expected (what's said in the room stays there).
- Explicitly inform participants that the session is being recorded for, for example, research or feedback purposes.
- Start with simple, easy, or icebreaker questions that have no wrong answers.
- If appropriate, utilize audio/visual recording or have a dedicated note-taker to ensure all data is captured.
- Look for patterns, themes, and commonalities in responses. Have more than one person analyze the data to avoid bias.
- Summarize key findings and provide actionable recommendations for stakeholders.
- Ensure you protect participants' personal information.
- Ensure participants know they can choose not to answer any question or leave at any time.

Example questions:

- Overall, what is working well at our organization?
- What else might be improved?
- Which activities/initiatives are essential to achieving the organization's vision?

- How might work units communicate/collaborate more effectively?
- Which of the organization's systems, processes, and rules must be updated (or replaced) to meet organizational opportunities/challenges in the future?
- How would you describe our culture as a whole and within your work unit?
- How would you describe the management/leadership style?
- Which skills must be added to/built in to meet organizational opportunities/challenges in the future?

G. Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews are one-on-one conversations used to gather insights, feedback, and buy-in from individuals with a vested interest in an organization's success. They are a critical step in the strategic planning process to aid in understanding diverse perspectives, identifying potential obstacles, aligning goals, and ensuring support for the final strategy by gathering feedback directly from those who impact or are impacted by the project.



Stakeholder Interviews

- One-to-one conversations with individuals who have a strong interest in your organization's directions and future goals.
- Who would you interview?
- What would you ask?

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Stakeholder interviews are critical to obtaining intimate and detailed opinions offering key perspectives from key stakeholders, especially those outside of your organization.

Stakeholder interviews are similar to focus groups but are usually performed in a one-on-one interview. The purpose is to dig deep into the minds of subject matter experts in the field.

Conducting the Interview

Explain the process: Provide the purpose for the interview as well as the questions in advance to enable them to prepare.

Start with rapport: Begin with easier questions to build comfort before moving to complex topics.

Ask open-ended questions: Encourage detailed responses by asking "how" and "what" questions instead of yes/no questions.

Listen actively: Pay attention not just to what is said, but also to the tone and what isn't said.

Use silence: Allow for pauses after asking a question, as stakeholders may offer more valuable information when filling the silence.

Note-taking: Take detailed notes or record the session (with permission) to capture key information.

Conclude professionally: Summarize key messages to ensure understanding and show respect for the stakeholder's time.

Provide next steps: At the end of the interview, explain the next steps in the project, and how the information will be utilized. Explain how they can access the final results (if a report is produced) and who to contact for more information.

There is a lot of variability in the questions you may ask, which will be impacted by the purpose of the interview and other areas specific to your organization.



Questions to Consider:

Who would you want to interview to inform your organization's strategic planning efforts? Consider why you are asking the individual and how their perspective could inform your strategic plan.

What would you ask?

Possible Stakeholder Interview Questions

- What has been your experience with the organization?
- Can you share your interactions with the staff?
- What are the organization's primary strengths?
- What distinguishes the organization from other organizations doing similar work?
- What are the primary weaknesses of the organization?
- What do you think are the most significant challenges facing the organization?
- Are there particular trends and developments in the field of service that should be considered when setting priorities for the future?
- Are there changes occurring that may impact the organization over the next three to five years?
- What can the organization do to increase awareness of the work and programs in the community?

H. Electronic Surveys


An electronic survey, also known as an e-survey or online survey, is a digital method of collecting information through various electronic channels. These surveys are typically distributed via email, social media, websites, or specialized survey platforms, allowing respondents to complete them using their computers, tablets, or smartphones.

Electronic Surveys

A digital method of collecting information through various electronic channels.

Audience:

- Internal stakeholders - board and staff
- External stakeholders - funders and partners
- Community-wide



Electronic Surveys Offer Flexibility and Convenience

Digital Distribution: Electronic surveys are delivered and accessed online, making them easily shareable and accessible to a broader audience.

Various Platforms: They can be created and deployed on various platforms, including dedicated survey software like SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics, and Google Forms, or even through simple online questionnaire builders like Typeform.

Data Collection and Analysis: The collected data is typically stored electronically, allowing for automated data analysis and reporting.

Flexibility and Convenience: Respondents can complete surveys at their convenience, using any device with internet access. Surveys can be translated into multiple languages, potentially engaging a wider audience.

Private and Confidential: Electronic surveys can be completed anonymously, allowing respondents the opportunity to be candid in their responses.

To create effective electronic survey questions for strategic planning:

- Define clear objectives
- Keep questions simple and unbiased
- Structure the survey logically with easy questions first, followed by more complex or sensitive ones

- Provide context
 - Brief introduction explaining the purpose of the survey
 - Estimated time to complete
 - How the information will be used

Ensure the survey is mobile-friendly, concise, and uses a mix of question types using a variety of formats like multiple choice, scales, and open-ended questions. Always test the survey before distribution to catch any issues. Consult resources such as [The American Association for Public Opinion Research](#), for additional best practices related to survey creation.

IV. Competitive Analysis

A competitive analysis is a strategic evaluation of your competitors' strengths and weaknesses to understand their market position relative to your own. It involves researching competitors' products, pricing, marketing tactics, and distribution to find opportunities and threats, which helps inform your own strategy and improve your competitive edge.

Benefits of a Competitive Analysis



- Assess market positioning.
- Analyze industry trends.
- Identify opportunities.
- Develop proactive strategies.
- Define organization's core competencies.
- Determine organization's competitive advantages.

The process typically includes identifying competitors, gathering data on their business and marketing efforts, and then comparing the findings to your own organization through a tool like a SWOT analysis. Periodically reviewing your competitors is essential for understanding your competitive edge and clarifying what truly sets your organization apart from others in similar positions.

For example, your organization is a food pantry that also provides clothing for people who attend job interviews. A competitive analysis would look at other food pantries in the area to assess how they operate, who they serve, the size, access, offerings, funding, staffing, service area, etc., and compare those to your organization. Does the clothing program set you apart? Do you offer hours of service that others do not? A competitive analysis helps to identify the strategic differentiators— what sets your organization apart from the others.



Exercise – Perform a Competitive Analysis

Analyze a Competitor

Choose a nonprofit organization that is similar to your organization.

- **Who are they?** (Mission, target audience, geographic focus)
- **What's their strength?** (Programs, funding success, partnerships)
- **What's their opportunity?** (Where they could improve or expand)

Develop a Key Insight

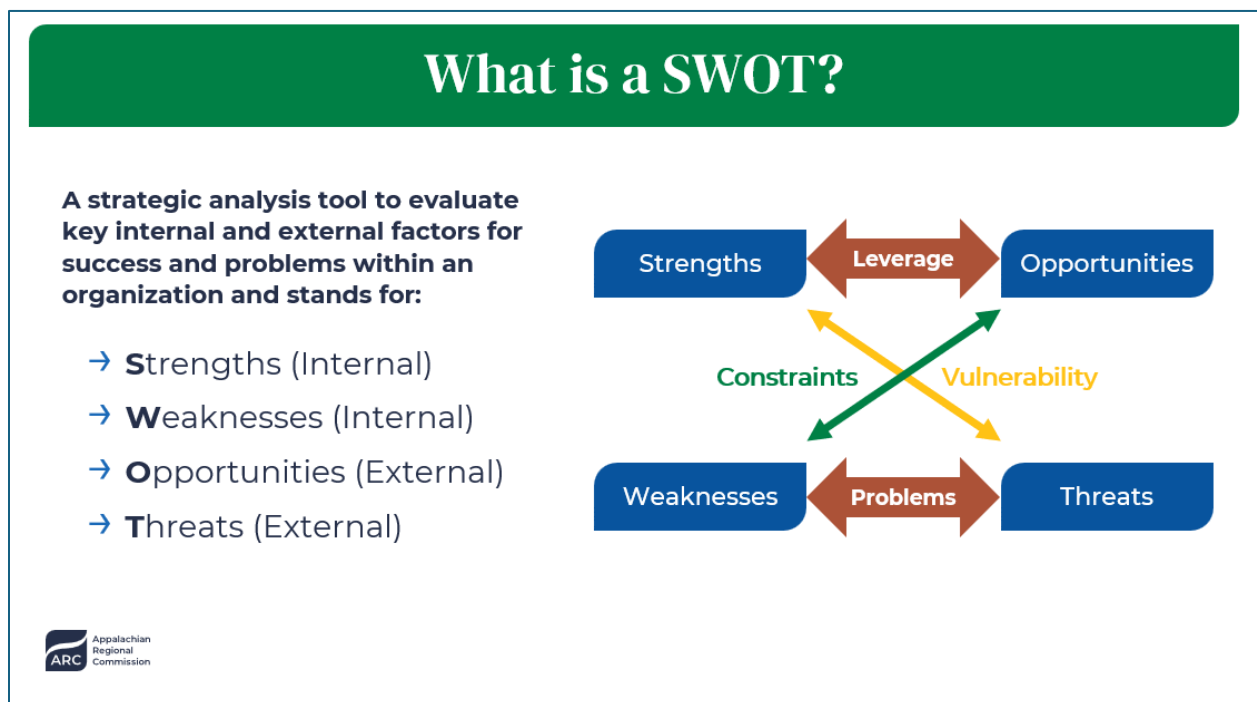
- Identify one actionable takeaway for how your nonprofit could position itself better against this competitor.

V. Performing a SWOT Analysis

This section of the session will present additional types of analysis like the ESTEL framework to assess the external landscape of your work. Then, we will discuss using the ESTEL with a SWOT analysis.

A. What is a SWOT?

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats and refers to a strategic planning technique used to evaluate these four aspects of a business, project, or person. Strengths and weaknesses are **internal factors**, while **opportunities and threats** are external. The SWOT analysis helps identify internal advantages and disadvantages and external factors that could either benefit or harm the venture, guiding decision-making and strategic planning. A SWOT can provide a clear overview of an organization's current situation and future potential. They provide the foundation for strategic thinking and planning.



Strengths: Internal traits that give your organization an advantage or set them apart from others who do similar things

Weaknesses: Internal variables that limit your organization or need improvement

Opportunities: External factors that can help your organization succeed

Threats: External factors that can endanger your chance of success

Constraints (Opportunities → Weaknesses)

This arrow shows how external opportunities can expose or bump up against internal limitations.

What it means: Even when the environment presents promising openings, internal weaknesses can constrain your ability to act on them.

Why it matters: It helps teams see that opportunities aren't automatically accessible. They require capacity, readiness, and sometimes foundational fixes before you can move.

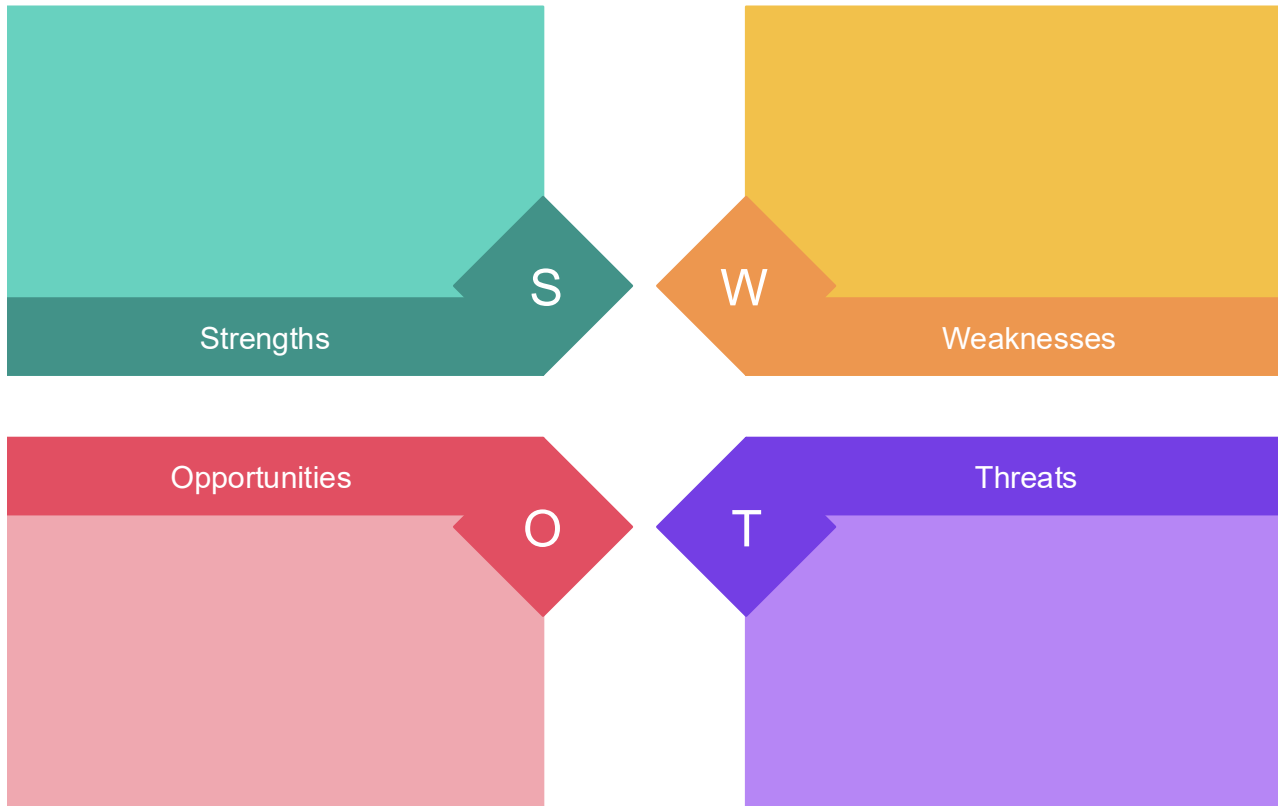
Vulnerability (Weaknesses → Opportunities)

This arrow highlights the ways opportunities can become liabilities if weaknesses aren't addressed.

What it means: When weaknesses meet opportunity, the organization may overextend, misjudge, or mishandle something that initially looked promising.

Why it matters: It surfaces the risk of chasing opportunities without the internal stability or skill to do it well.

B. Questions for Effective SWOT Analysis



Conducting a SWOT analysis means asking targeted questions that help the organization examine its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in its work.



Exercise – SWOT Analysis

Start a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis for your organization. A SWOT is never general but always related to a specific market need. Review the questions below and circle 3 -4 per section to answer as you complete the SWOT for your organization.

S.W.O.T. Analysis Questions

INTERNAL

Strengths – What can we build on?

- What are we most proud of as an organization? How does that reflect our greatest strength?
- What makes us unique? What can we be best at in our world?
- What is our proudest achievement in the last year or two?
- How do we use our strengths to get results?
- How do our strengths fit with the realities of the marketplace?

- What do we do or provide that is world class for our customers, our industry, and other potential stakeholders?
- What does the organization do especially well?
- What processes are especially effective?
- What valuable (and unique) assets and resources exist?
- What do stakeholders and partners identify as strengths?

Weaknesses

- What could the organization do better?
- What are the bottlenecks in key processes?
- What have stakeholders and partners complained about or criticized?
- What are vulnerabilities to competition?
- What processes or other aspects pose risks?
- What is lacking that interferes with achieving success?

EXTERNAL


Opportunities – What are our stakeholders asking for?

- How do we make sense of opportunities provided by external forces and trends?
- What are the top three opportunities on which we should focus our efforts?
- What is the trend with current products and services (or programs and projects)?
- How can we best meet the needs of our stakeholders, including customers, employees, stakeholders, and community?
- Who are possible new customers?
- What are possible new markets, products, services or processes that could be opportunities in the future?
- How can we differentiate ourselves from existing or potential competitors?
- How can we reframe challenges to be seen as exciting opportunities?
- What new skills do we need to move forward?
- What emerging trends can be leveraged?
- What opportunities exist that have not been utilized or explored?
- What new methods and technologies may become useful for operations in the next few years?

Threats

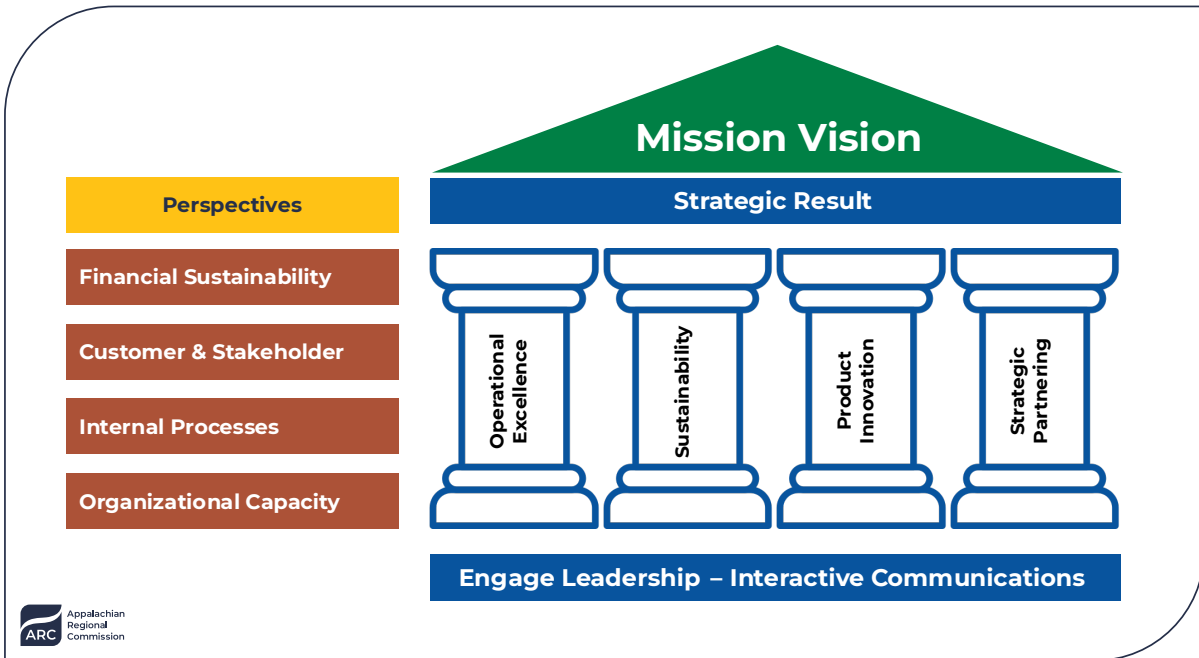
- What external roadblocks interfere with success?
- What emerging trends or risks could negatively impact future success?
- What new technologies, shifts in consumer preferences, and new competition impact the organization?

VI. Strategic Themes



Strategic Themes

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Once that data is collected, you may ask: now what? Now your organization will begin to identify the dominant strategic perspectives and themes that show up as findings in your data. Before diving into a specific project, your organization will want to begin to create a one-page road map. The graphic above reflects the areas of a strategy map.

- Mission and vision are your organization’s north star guiding your direction towards your future state and the why behind your existence.
- The strategic results are what your organization aspires to achieve at the conclusion of the strategic plan. It is how your organization will know if your plan was successful.
- The pillars represent how your organization will achieve strategic results within your strategic plan through themes identified in the data collection process.
- The perspectives on the side represent a holistic look at your organization using the balance scorecard approach.
- The foundation of your plan is to have engaged leadership who provide multidirectional communications.

Themes affect all of the balanced scorecard perspectives (financial, customer, internal process, and organizational capacity). A strategic theme is an area where your organization must excel to achieve your vision.

A. Strategic Theme Examples



Strategic Themes Examples



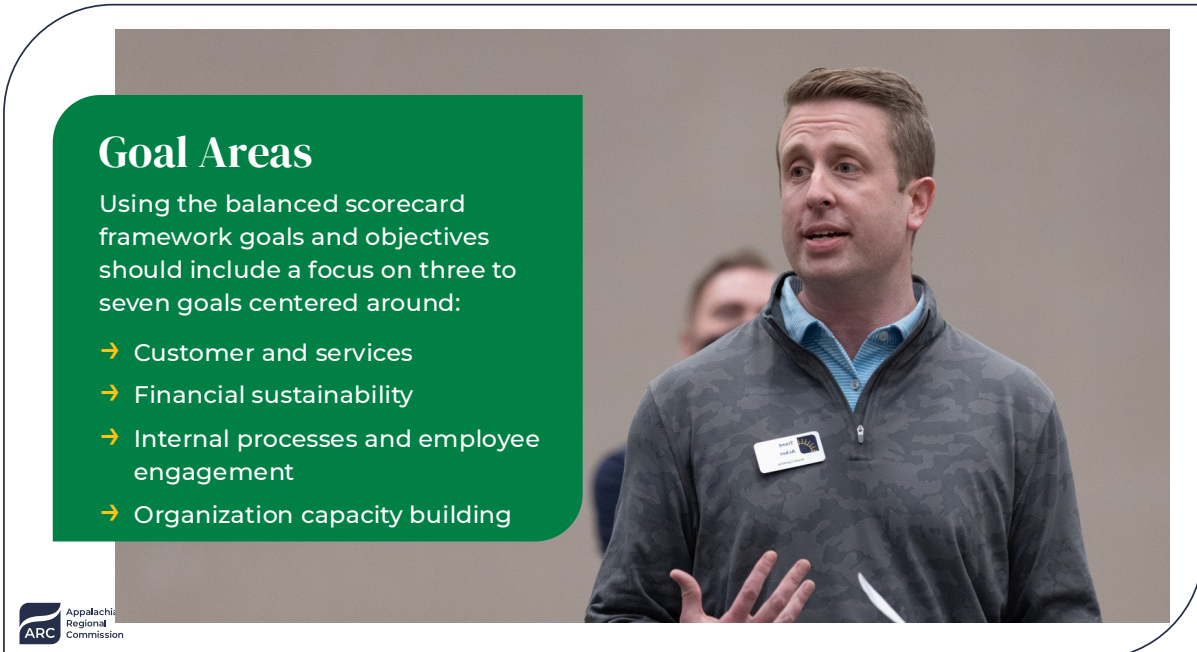
- Governance
- Brand building
- Mission impact
- Customer service
- Finance and fundraising
- Employee engagement

Strategic themes are aspects of organizational development that organize and prioritize organizational priorities to move the organization forward and achieve the vision: goals, objectives, and initiatives.

3-5 Strategic Themes

- Align with the organization's vision of the future.
- Be strategic instead of focused on day-to-day activities or current activities.
- Build on the customer value proposition.
- Define the organization's high-level business strategy.
- Break down the vision and purpose into action.
- Focus energy on desired strategic results.

B. Goal Areas



Goal Areas

Using the balanced scorecard framework goals and objectives should include a focus on three to seven goals centered around:

- Customer and services
- Financial sustainability
- Internal processes and employee engagement
- Organization capacity building

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As stated in the previous section, data collection and analysis will help your organization identify three or four strategic focus areas that build on the customer value proposition to define the organization's high-level strategy, breaking down the vision and mission into action and focusing energy on desired strategic results.

Using the balanced scorecard framework, goals and objectives should include a focus on three to seven goals centered around:

- Customer
- Employee learning and growth
- Financial
- Internal processes
- Governance and Leadership



Questions to Consider:

If your organization excels in the 3-4 areas you have identified, will you achieve your vision?

VII. Assignment

- Conduct a SWOT analysis with your leadership team.
- Identify one to two themes you feel are priorities within your organization.
- If not completed yet, complete the organizational self-assessment in Session 3.

Session 4

SESSION 4: Putting Your Plan Together

- I. Session Outcomes
- II. Assignment Review
- III. Putting the Framework Together
- IV. Writing the Strategic Plan
- V. Change Management
- VI. Assignment

I. Session Outcomes

Session Outcomes

After this session, you will:

- Identify meaningful goals, objectives, and initiatives.
- Develop an annual operations plan.
- Understand change management principles.



II. Assignment Review - SWOT Analysis and Strategic Themes

Session 3 covered several topics including data gathering, competitive analysis, conducting a SWOT analysis, and identifying strategic themes.

Session 3 concluded with an assignment around conducting a SWOT analysis with your organization's leadership team.



Questions to Consider:

What surprised you from your SWOT analysis?

What reinforced what you already knew?

What are the strengths that stood out?

Weaknesses?

How might your organization incorporate the identified opportunities into the strategic plan?

Threats?

You were also asked to identify one to two themes you feel are priorities within your organization. Have those written down and available as you begin this session.

III. Putting the Framework Together



Measuring Success



A. Goal Trauma



Goal trauma is feeling...

- Immense pressure to have all the answers.
- Stressed when setting goals with deadlines and accountability.
- Apprehensive about committing to goals.



Nonprofit leaders can feel immense pressure to have all the answers. Setting goals and writing them down can be daunting. It is a brave act to identify and

communicate the organizational goals and begin to establish timelines and performance measures for those goals. Have an open mind as we move forward in this session and begin to establish the goals for your strategic plan.

B. SMART Goals

SMART Goals



Specific



Measurable



Achievable



Relevant



Time-bound



SMART goals are a way of consistently measuring performance. In strategic plans, you have cascading tiers that begin with high-level goals at the top, flowing into specific objectives, and finally ending in more concrete initiatives. This connects individual work to the organization's big picture, ensuring that everyone is aligned and moving in the same direction.

Goals: Broad, long-term outcomes.

Objectives: Specific, measurable steps to achieve the goals.

Initiatives: Projects and actions taken to meet the objectives.

Organizations should use the SMART framework when writing goals and objectives.

SMART Goal Breakdown

Specific: Increase the number of families served through expanded partnerships and volunteer support.

Measurable: Grow from 1,000 to 1,200 families served per month.

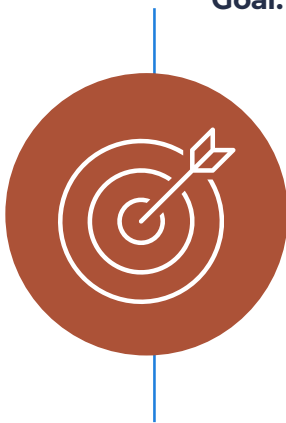
Achievable: Securing two new donors and recruiting 15 volunteers is realistic with the organization's capacity.

Relevant: Aligns with the mission of reducing hunger in the community.

Time-bound: The goal will be achieved by December 31, 2025, with monthly progress tracking.

Let's look at an example of how the SMART Goal framework is utilized in identifying the goal and objectives within a strategic plan.

Sample SMART Goal & Objectives



Goal: By 12/31/2025, increase the number of families served by 20%.

Objective 1: Expand partnerships with local farms and grocery stores. Increase food donations and secure two new food donors.

→ **Initiative 1:** Create a list of 10 possible partners by January 2025.

→ **Initiative 2:** Develop a mailer/email campaign in July 2025.

→ **Initiative 3:** Meet with each prospect by Oct2025.

Objective 2: Grow the volunteer program to 100 volunteers.

→ **Initiative 1:** Develop an outreach recruitment strategy to recruit 15 additional volunteers to support the distribution effort.

→ **Initiative 2:** Develop an onboarding process.

→ **Initiative 3:** Track monthly volunteer activity distribution records and donor agreements.



The goal and objectives are clear, measurable, actionable, and tied to the nonprofit's mission of addressing food insecurity.

C. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are quantifiable measures used by organizations to evaluate success in meeting strategic and operational goals. KPIs track progress toward objectives while providing insights for data-driven decision-making. KPIs are the elements of your plan that express:

- What do you want to achieve, and by when? They are the quantifiable, outcome-based statements used to measure if you're on track to meet your goals or objectives.
- Good plans have 5-7 KPIs to manage and track the plan's progress.

Using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

A key performance indicator is a quantifiable, outcome-based statement that measures if you're on track to meet your goals or objectives.

- How will the program be measured?
- How will data be collected?
- Who is responsible?



What KPIs Are

Quantifiable: KPIs are metrics that can be measured and expressed numerically.

Goal-oriented: They are directly linked to an organization's specific, pre-defined objectives and targets.

Measurable: KPIs should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).

Performance trackers: They provide a way to monitor performance over time and assess how effectively a business is achieving its goals.

Why KPIs are Important

Drive focus: They help individuals and teams concentrate on the activities that matter most for achieving business goals.

Enable data-driven decision making: KPIs provide objective data to guide strategic and operational choices, rather than relying on gut feeling.

Measure progress: They act as milestones to gauge progress and allow businesses to identify areas for improvement.

Ensure alignment: By using the right KPIs, a company can ensure that daily tasks are connected to broader organizational goals.

KPIs should address the following:

- How will the program be measured?
- How will you measure these?
- Who is responsible/accountable?

D. Measuring Performance



-
- **Client satisfaction**
 - **Program outcomes**
 - **Financial accountability**
 - **Standards of quality in service delivery**
 - **Employee engagement & satisfaction**
 - **Strategic plan objectives**
-

So how do we pick the best KPIs for our organization? This requires careful consideration by key stakeholders and should include what is feasible for the organization, who will be responsible for tracking, and what the data will tell you about the progress your organization is tracking.

Common KPI categories include:

- Financial – diversified funding sources, sustainability
- Operational – program outcomes, standards
- Customer – client satisfaction
- Marketing – brand awareness, publicity
- Human Resources – employee engagement and satisfaction
- Board Development – board recruitment, training and onboarding

E. Examples of KPIs

A woman with short dark hair, wearing glasses and a red button-down shirt, is presenting a slide. The slide has a green background with white text. The title is "Example of a KPI: Measurable Targets". Below the title is a list of five items, each preceded by a right-pointing arrow. The items are: "Grow endowment by \$5 million", "Lower staff turnover rate", "Diversify revenue", "Create a report", and "Present recommendations". In the bottom left corner of the slide, there is a logo for the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) with the text "Appalachian Regional Commission" next to it.

**Example of a KPI:
Measurable Targets**

- Grow endowment by \$5 million
- Lower staff turnover rate
- Diversify revenue
- Create a report
- Present recommendations

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There is a difference between outcomes and outputs. Both can be useful for measuring progress within your strategic plan.

- **Outcomes** measure program impact.
- **Outputs** measure program activity.

Example: After-school programs don't measure grades or longitudinal impact; instead, they focus on relationships with adults, consistency of attendance, and access to enrichment programs.

Lower staff turnover rate (by what % annually?)

Diversify revenue (from X to Y number of sources; dependency quotient*)

*A risk assessment metric used by nonprofits to measure dependence on top donors by dividing the total contributions by the organization's total expenditures. A high quotient indicates high risk. Signaling that the loss of a few donors could significantly impact financial stability.

Additional Examples:

- **Employee Retention Rate:** (# of employees who stayed at the company for the whole time period)/(# employees at the start of the time period) x 100.

- **Year-Over-Year Growth:** Year-over-year growth is the percentage you increased your revenue or budget in one year when compared to the year before.
- **Operating Surplus/Deficit:** The aim is to have an operating reserve to cover at least three months of annual operating expenses.
- **Pre- and Post- Test Scores:** Pre and Post Scores refer to the changes in knowledge, skills, abilities, and/or behaviors amongst your beneficiaries. These changes are often referred to as “outcomes” within the social impact measurement frameworks.
- **Landing Page Conversion Rate:** How many visitors to your donation page complete the donation process.



Questions to Consider:

What are the key metrics you use for measuring progress within your organization? If you do not know the KPIs for your organization, consider what KPIs you would suggest and note them.

IV. Writing the Strategic Plan



Goals, Objectives, and Initiatives



In one of our Session 3 assignments, you were asked to identify one to two themes you feel are priorities within your organization. As this session transitions into putting the pieces of a strategic plan together, please have those themes available to reference.

A. Strategic Theme Examples

The data gathering component of the process should inform the themes based upon the feedback gathered from key stakeholders. Below are several organizational themes that could be incorporated into a strategic plan.



Strategic Theme Examples

- Governance
- Brand building
- Mission impact
- Customer service
- Finance and fundraising
- Employee engagement



Most strategic plans have 4-5 theme areas.

- Each theme will have one goal statement
- Each goal will have 1-4 objectives
- Each objective will have 1-3 initiatives

What are the themes you identified for your organization?

B. Strategic Plan Components

Strategic Plan Components



- **Executive summary (high-level overview)**
- **Preliminary metrics (KPIs)**
- **Time frames**
- **Initial strategic initiatives**
- **Estimated budget (strategic, capital, and operating)**



Now that you have identified your organization's strategic theme areas, you can begin to write your strategic plan. Drafting the plan allows you to share and communicate priorities and strategies with key stakeholders.

A strategic plan should include:

- Executive summary high-level overview
- Data gathering methods and participation levels of stakeholders
- Key Performance Indicators (measurable and timebound to track progress)
- Time frames
- Initial strategic initiatives
- Estimated budget

C. Goals, Objectives, and Initiatives

Goals, Objectives, and Initiatives



- **Goals** are long-term outcomes you wish to develop.
- **Objectives** are milestones along the way, key projects that need to be done to achieve your goals.
- **Initiatives** are action items you implement to meet your objectives and then your goals.



Objectives:
Milestones and key projects that need to be met or completed along the way to achieve your goals.



Required elements for an objective:

*3-5 objectives per goal (typically 15-18 total)

- SMART criteria
- Champion (the individual accountable for leading and advancing the objective)
- Resources needed
- Start and end date
- Key performance indicators (KPIs)

Projects, tasks, and activities critical to the strategy's success are developed, prioritized, and implemented. It is important to focus the organization on executing the most prioritized strategic projects rather than creating a long list of potential

actions and projects. Without this disciplined focus, organizations struggle to execute their strategy.



Exercise – Mission Impact Theme

Instructions: Take one theme and draft a goal for that area. Remember to keep it broad and overarching. Then write a goal for employee engagement and mission impact.

- Write 1-3 objectives for each goal.
- Select an objective under each goal area and write 1 initiative for each objective.

Use SMART framework: **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.**

Use this example format:

By December 31, 2026, increase the number of families served by 20% (from 1,000 to 1,200 families per month) (goal) by expanding partnerships with local farms and grocery stores (objectives), securing two new food donors, and recruiting 15 additional volunteers to support distribution efforts (initiatives). Progress will be tracked monthly by (role) staff member through distribution records and donor agreements.



Operationalizing the Plan



Strategic plans should not be developed and then put on a shelf! The strategic plan, once developed, should be transferred into an annual operations plan to help map out the long-term strategy into an actionable guide the organization can utilize throughout the year.

D. Operations Plan



Operations Plan Ensures

- Accountability
- Transparency
- Tracked progress



An operations plan ensures:

Accountability

Key tasks and objectives that have a timeline should be assigned to individuals or groups.

Transparency

Identify who is responsible and hold them accountable. Communicate specifically the goals and progress.

Tracked Progress

Regular updates make sure progress is being made and milestones are being met.

E. Operations Plan Components



Example

Theme: Program Sustainability

Goal: Strengthen program sustainability and infrastructure.

Objective: Expand revenue streams to support long-term sustainability of the program.

Initiative: Expand funding base of support beyond state budget allocation by Q4 of 2026.

Initiative: Create foundation opportunities pipeline by Q1 2026.

KPI: Three new sources of funding added to program portfolio.

Initiative	Owner	Start	End	KPI
3.1.1 Expanding funding base of support beyond state budget allocation.	Program Manager	2025 Q3	2026 Q4	3 new sources of funding added to the program portfolio.


Holding regular check-in meetings to review progress and making adjustments is key to ensuring your operations and strategic plan are aligned and accountable.

F. Operations Plan

Operations Plan Example

Goal 1:

Strategic Objective & Strategic Initiatives	Owner	KPI(s) or Performance Measure	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Status	Comments
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Objective 1.1:																
1.1.1																
1.1.2																
1.1.3																
1.1.4																
Objective 1.2:																
1.2.1																
1.2.2																
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Objective 1.3:																
1.3.1																
1.3.2																
1.3.3																
1.3.4																
Objective 1.4:																
1.4.1																
1.4.2																
1.4.3																
1.4.4																



An **Operations Plan** is a detailed plan that lists key items, measures, and target dates of completion. The plan:

- Provides a one-page summary of the organization's strategic priorities.
- Ensures that the organization's activities are aligned with the strategic plan.
- Uses data collected to make relevant changes to the plan in real time.
- Should be reviewed monthly by organization leaders and quarterly by staff and the board of directors.

Tips:

- Consider color coding to help viewers easily navigate the plan
- Use consistent language and a standard process for updating the plan so that all information is entered in the same way.
- Keep it simple and don't overcomplicate the plan layout to where it becomes difficult to update.
- Share access to the plan so that stakeholders can easily locate and view the current status.
- Incorporate the plan and updates as part of regular meeting agendas to embed the plan into the organization's work.
- Change the dates or update initiatives or objectives when necessary.

V. Change Management



Change Management and Communications



A. Change Management and Communication

Change is inevitable. Once your organization begins to implement your strategic plan, the daily operations will shift over time to reflect the direction that the organization is going in. Adapting to and managing change is a critical skill for leaders, managers, and support staff.



A Strategic Plan Means Change

- Strategic planning is about developing a process to achieve your vision and drive the organization from where you are now to where you want to go.



For implementing a new strategic plan, effective change management involves a structured process that includes assessing the change and stakeholders, developing a clear vision and plan, and executing and monitoring the implementation. Key strategies include creating a detailed roadmap, communicating transparently with all stakeholders, and providing necessary training and support to minimize resistance and ensure successful adoption.

B. Principles for Implementing Change

Implementing change effectively requires a focus on leadership commitment, employee involvement, clear communication, flexibility, and a culture-centric approach. Leaders must champion the change, while employees need to be actively involved, supported, and provided with continuous, clear communication about the 'why' and 'how.' Successfully managing a transition also depends on building a flexible, adaptive process that aligns with and reinforces the new organizational culture.



-
- **Leadership Commitment:**
Strong and visible support from leaders is critical.
 - **Employee Involvement:**
Engaging employees at all levels builds trust and commitment.
 - **Clear Communication:**
Consistent, transparent, and two-way communication is essential.
 - **Flexibility:**
Adapting your approach when needed is important.
 - **Focus on Culture:**
Align the change with the organization's values and culture to ensure lasting impact.
-

Leadership Commitment

Show active support: Leaders must be visible and vocal in their support for the change, demonstrating their commitment through their actions. Model adoption of the changes for all to see and observe.

Align the leadership team: Ensure that all leaders are aligned on the vision and strategy for change presenting a united front to the organization.

Employee Involvement

Engage and empower employees: Involve employees in the change process to get their buy-in and help them experience ownership.

Provide training and support: Give employees the necessary skills and support to adapt to the new ways of working as well as time to adjust.

Clear Communication

Explain the 'why': Clearly communicate the reasons for the change and how it will benefit the organization and its employees.

Provide a clear vision: Establish a clear vision for the future and communicate it often through various channels. Repetition and consistency are key. If the organization has no vision statement, incorporate creating one into the strategic plan.

Be transparent: Provide continuous updates on the change's progress and address concerns openly and honestly. Don't hide roadblocks, challenges, or delays – be open and address the impacts and seek input as appropriate.

Flexibility

Be prepared to adapt: Recognize that a plan will need adjustments, so the process should be flexible enough to allow for feedback and changes in direction. Include regular check-ins and update meetings to make adjustments in real time.

Embrace a learning mindset: Be open to learning from mistakes and adjust your approach as you go. Encourage team members to share their learnings, and ensure leaders model this practice and actively support others in doing the same.

Focus on Culture

Integrate with culture: Ensure the change initiative is aligned with the company's core values and long-term culture.

Build a culture of trust: Foster an environment where employees feel safe to voice concerns and be part of the solution.

Reinforce the change: After the change has been implemented, reinforce it through new processes, behaviors, and by celebrating successes to make it sustainable. Some team members will take a 'wait and see' approach, demonstrate to the staff throughout the organization that the changes are being integrated into the organizational structure.

C. Characteristics of a Strong Leader



A Good Organizational Leader Requires:

- Having excellent communication skills
- Being able to keep the group moving forward
- Being a facilitator of the strategic plan rather than the hierarchical model

 Appalachian Regional Commission

Being a good organizational leader requires strong communication and a commitment to change.

It requires understanding the issues and facing change head on. Effective leadership regarding a commitment to change involves a multifaceted approach that encompasses **clear communication, visible action, and strategic facilitation**. These elements work in tandem to create momentum and ensure the change initiative is understood, accepted, and implemented successfully across an organization.

1. Modeling Excellent Communication Skills

Leaders must not only articulate the vision for change but also embody the new direction through their communication. Don't assume everyone understands the change or is on board from the onset. Craft a compelling message and share it through multiple channels.

This involves:

Clarity and Transparency: Explicitly explain what is changing, why it is necessary, and how it aligns with organizational goals. Transparency builds trust and reduces anxiety. Provide information and opportunities to ask questions. Don't leave the team with their assumptions or seeking clarity from sources that are not accurate.

Active Listening: Provide platforms for feedback, address concerns openly, and adjust the message based on input from all levels of the organization.

Consistency: Ensure the message is uniform across all channels and reinforced by actions, demonstrating commitment and sincerity.

2. Setting the Pace and Momentum

Leaders are responsible for establishing the appropriate rhythm for change—fast enough to demonstrate progress, but slow enough to be sustainable. Check in with the team to assess if the pace fits the current organizational conditions and adjust as appropriate. Some seasons within an organization may require a slower pace while other periods may allow for acceleration.

This is achieved by:

Urgency without Panic: Create a sense of necessity while maintaining a structured, thoughtful approach. Don't burn out the team early on; a strategic plan is long term and will require many changes throughout implementation.

Celebrating Milestones: Recognize early wins to build positive momentum and motivate continued effort.

Providing Resources: Ensure teams have the necessary tools, training, and support to adapt to the new processes. Ensure the organization budget aligns with the priorities within the strategic plan.

3. Facilitating the Plan

True commitment goes beyond direction; it includes active facilitation and removal of barriers.


Key aspects include:

Empowering Others: Delegate responsibility and authority to change champions throughout the organization.

Problem-Solving: Actively identify and address resistance or roadblocks that hinder progress.


Continuous Adjustment: Monitor progress, gather data, and be prepared to refine the plan based on real-world implementation results.

D. Responses to Change



Responses to Change

What do you feel when you go through change?



Questions to consider:

When you experience change, what are some of your feelings?

What supports have traditionally helped you adopt changes within your organization?

As you think about the strategic plan for your organization, was change management and communications interwoven into the implementation? If not, as you reflect, what might you do differently?

Common experiences of change can include:

- Feeling awkward
- Initially focusing on what you have to give up
- Feeling alone even though everyone else is going through change
- Feeling overwhelmed and unable to focus on priorities
- Staff or stakeholders being at different levels of readiness for change
- Feeling resource deprived
- Reverting to old behaviors to lessen the pressure

E. Managing Change



How Do We Manage Change?

- Effective communication
- Responsive decision-making
- Support and resources
- Gradual implementation
- Leadership and culture
- Stress management



Ensure a communication plan is incorporated into the strategic plan implementation. Don't rush the strategic plan launch; ensure the communications plan is created detailing the projected changes and the anticipated impact on the organization.

This starts with:

Clarity: Communicate clearly, consistently, and transparently about the change process, reasons, and expected outcomes.

Feedback: Establish channels for feedback and address concerns promptly. Determine a process for how feedback should be submitted, reviewed, and responded to.

Use participatory decision-making. Be sure to include and focus on:

Participation: Involve employees in the decision-making process and seek their input on changes that affect them. Consider creating a committee with organizational representatives that can support efforts, champion initiatives, and communicate updates throughout all layers of the team.

Empowerment: Provide employees with responsibilities so that they can see themselves and their work, contributing to planning and implementation.

Include Support and Resources. Utilize:

Training: Offer comprehensive training and development programs to equip individuals with the necessary skills for implementing the plan.

Support Systems: Provide access to support systems, such as coaching, counseling, and peer support groups.

Focus on Gradual Implementation:

Use a Phased Approach: Implement changes gradually to allow individuals to adapt incrementally.

Use Pilots and Trials: Conduct pilot programs or trials to identify potential issues and refine processes before full implementation.

An emphasis on Leadership and Culture:

Role Modeling: Leaders should model the desired behaviors and attitudes to inspire confidence and trust.

Cultural Alignment: Ensure that changes align with the organization's values and culture to minimize disruption.

Use Stress Management techniques:

Wellness Programs: Offer stress management and wellness programs to help individuals cope with change.

Work-Life Balance: Provide flexibility and support to help employees maintain a healthy work-life balance.

By identifying and addressing these triggers, leaders can create a supportive environment that reduces stress and resistance, facilitating a smoother and more successful change process.

VI. Assignment

Use the operations plan template shared earlier in this guide as inspiration and begin to put your operations/implementation plan together using a format of your choice. The template is located in the Appendix.

- Choose one strategic theme area.
 - Include a draft goal statement.
 - Include three objectives for the goal statement.
 - Identify two to three initiatives for each objective.
 - Consider the necessary resources, the timeline for implementation, and the role to be assigned oversight/responsibility for each initiative.

Note: As you begin to draft the strategic plan, keep in mind that each strategic theme should have its own operations plan worksheet.

Session 5

SESSION 5: Conclusion

- I. Session Outcomes
- II. Strategic Planning Learning Journey
- III. Reflection
- IV. Organizational Impact

I. Session Outcomes

Session Outcomes

- Our Strategic Planning Learning Journey
- Reflection
- Organizational Impact Activity

II. Strategic Planning Learning Journey



Our Learning Journey

What did we learn?

What were your key takeaways?

Do you have any further insights?



WEEK	1	Introduction session
WEEK	2	Session 2: Begin With the End in Mind
WEEK	3	Session 3: Assessment and Data Collection
WEEK	4	Session 4: Putting Your Plan Together
WEEK	5	Session 5: Conclusion

Session 1: Introduction to the Course

- Welcome
- Course overview, outcomes, and objectives

Session 2: Begin With the End in Mind

- Understand the strategic planning process
- Explore your vision, mission, and values as your north star
- Understand the balanced scorecard framework for strategic planning

Session 3: Assessment and Data Collection

- Why data collection is key
- Different kinds of data
- Developing a SWOT analysis

Session 4: Putting Your Plan Together

- Identify meaningful goals, objectives, and initiatives
- Develop an annual operations plan
- Understand change management principles

III. Learning Reflection



Questions to consider:

What were your key takeaways from the program?

What has surprised you?

How are you beginning to think differently?

IV. Activity – Organizational Impact Reflection

Assess the impact of the training program on your organization.

- What has your organization already done to implement new knowledge, skills, or abilities gained from the training program?
- How do you see new knowledge, skills, or abilities from the training program impacting your organization's capacity challenges?

Next, write three (3) action steps your organization needs to take to apply this new knowledge.

This month

This year

Next year

Glossary of Terms

Strategic Planning: An organizational management activity used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, and ensure that employees and stakeholders are working toward common goals and intended outcomes/results. It is a disciplined effort to produce decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, who it serves, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future.

Strategic Management: Ongoing activities and processes that organizations use to coordinate and align resources and actions with mission, vision, and strategy throughout an organization.

Strategy Map: A one-page graphic to show how the organization creates value through five perspectives – mission, financial stewardship, leadership and governance, employee experience, and organization capacity.

Mission: Mission gives the organization heart and answers these questions: Why does what we do matter? What difference are we making in the world? Why would our supporters miss us if we were not here? What do we do? How do we do it?

Vision: A vision statement is a concise, thoughtful, and inclusive statement of where the organization is going and what it looks like when there. The vision articulates the organization's future state. What will our organization look like in 5–10 years? What does success look like? What mountain are we climbing and why?

Core Values: Values are deeply held convictions, priorities, and underlying assumptions that influence the organization's attitudes and behaviors. Values are the guiding principles for how people in an organization are expected to behave, how teams treat each other, and how you expect your organization to treat your customers. Values define the organization's culture and personality, providing a "should/should not" test for all behaviors and decisions.

Balanced Scorecard: A balanced scorecard examines strategic measures in addition to traditional financial measures to gain a more comprehensive view of performance. The balanced scorecard is a holistic system for managing strategy. A key benefit of using a disciplined framework is that it provides organizations with a way to connect the dots between the various components of strategic planning and management.

Key Strategic Themes: The three or four strategic focus areas that build on the customer value proposition to define the organization's high-level business strategy,

breaking down the vision and mission into action and focusing energy on desired strategic results.

Key Strategic Results: End outcomes achieved through the successful execution of the organization's strategy.

Goals: The longer-term directional themes, or aims, to be achieved in accordance with the organization's vision and mission. Goals energize, direct, and motivate and are more narrowly focused than vision and mission statements.

Strategic Objectives: Strategic objectives serve as the bridge between your ambitious vision and the high-level goals necessary to achieve it. Establish the boundaries for what your organization's effort must focus on and create the top layer of your strategic plan's framework.

Objective Owner: An individual assigned to be responsible for managing an objective and initiatives.

Strategic Initiatives: Projects, tasks, and activities critical to the strategy's success are developed, prioritized, and implemented. It is essential to prioritize the organization's focus on executing the most critical strategic projects over creating a lengthy list of potential actions and projects. Without this disciplined focus, organizations struggle to execute their strategy.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are the elements of your plan that express what you want to achieve by when. They are the quantifiable, outcome-based statements used to measure if you're on track to meet your goals or objectives. Good plans have 5-7 KPIs to manage and track the progress of the plan.

Targets: The desired level of performance for a reporting period. Every KPI should have a target that aligns with your measure and the timeframe for achievement. These are a numeric value you're seeking to achieve.

Resources: Resources needed to achieve a strategic objective – people, finances, technology, and external support.

Operations Plan: Annual operations planning is designed to assess the organization's performance over the past 12 months and articulate its key focus for the coming 12 months.

Scorecard: KPIs are captured on a visual scoreboard and updated regularly. Here is where we need to be, and here is where we are now.

Appendix

Goal 1:																
Strategic Objective & Strategic Initiatives	Owner	KPI(s) or Performance Measure	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Status	Comments
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Objective 1.1:																
1.1.1																
1.1.2																
1.1.3																
1.1.4																
Objective 1.2:																
1.2.1																
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Objective 1.3:																
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