

Leadership Camp for Directors and Emerging Leaders of Family and Youth-Run Organizations

No More Strategic Plans, But “Planning Strategically”

“Plans are useless, but planning is everything,”

General Dwight D. Eisenhower

“Historically, strategic planners focused on predicting the future based on historic trend lines; invested heavily in gathering all available data; and produced a small number of directives issued from the top, for the rest of the organization to execute.

This approach to strategic planning was a reasonably good fit for much of the business world from the fifties through the eighties. But with the rise of high-tech tools and increased globalization in the nineties, the world began to change, and now it looks quite different indeed. The future is no longer reasonably predictable based on the past—in fact; it is liable to be startlingly different. Good data is easy to access and cheap to acquire. Communication is rapid, indiscriminate, and constant.

The world has become a more turbulent place, where anyone with a new idea can put it into action before you can say “startup” and launch widespread movements with a single Tweet. This has left organizational leaders with a real problem, since the trusted, traditional approach to strategic planning is based on assumptions that no longer hold. The static strategic plan is dead.”ⁱ

Three or Five-Year Plans

Previously, it was always recommended that non-profit organizations develop five-year plans. This was during a period when the economy and political climate were more stable and predictable. In our current rapidly changing and unpredictable times, three-year strategic plans are felt to be more reasonable.

Planning to Plan

An effective plan requires a great deal of preparation before a committee sits down to develop a plan. Data collection and **stakeholder input** are critical to have before starting to plan. Looking back at data about services, budgets and identifying trends is all valuable information to share during the planning process. Likewise, soliciting input from a number of stakeholders, including staff members, Board members, families who are served by the organization, funders and partner organizations is important. Tools such as surveys, focus groups or interviews are all ways to solicit stakeholder input. Stakeholders should be asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the organization as well as future opportunities for the organization.

In preparation for a planning process, it is also important to look outside the organization at the rapidly **changing environment** including: changes in leadership or administrations; changes in legislation such as the Affordable Care Act; changes in funding opportunities such as Medicaid billing for peer support; changes in technology such as online health records. All of these factors and more are important to have identified before the planning process begins.

Key Steps to Planning Strategically:

1. A clear and comprehensive grasp of external opportunities and challenges
2. A realistic and comprehensive assessment of the organization's strengths and limitations
3. Stakeholder voice in planning process through surveys, focus groups or interviews
4. A commitment of resources, including staff time, possible consultant time, funds for survey, rental of space for planning meetings, refreshments and other materials
5. Empowered planning committee that includes Board and staff representation and other stakeholders
6. Involvement of senior leadership – staff and Board
7. Sharing of responsibility by staff and Board
8. Learning from best practices
9. Clear priorities and implementation plan
10. Patience
11. Commitment to change
12. Flexibility to respond to a changing environment

Components of a Plan

1. Mission Statement – A concise statement of “Why we exist” and “What we do”
2. Vision Statement – A statement of the organization's desired future
3. Values Statement – Principles on which the organization is built
4. Goals and Objectives – Desired outcomes for specific aspects of the organization, such as program, administration, marketing, fundraising, governance
5. Strategies and Tactics – Steps and activities to achieve goals
6. Implementation Plan – Spells out the cost, priority, timeline and accountability for each strategy

Making it Work

An effective strategic plan is built on a realistic assessment of what is reasonable and doable while at the same time setting goals that reach beyond what currently exists. Above all, plans must not be set in concrete, but must be flexible to accommodate a changing environment. Plans are working documents that should be revisited and updated at least annually.

Netflix Story

Netflix was launched in 1997 with 30 employees and 925 films available for rent. By 2002, the company had grown to over 100,000 titles available and 10 million subscribers and was one of the U.S. Postal Service's largest customers. In 2007, Netflix moved away from its core business model of mailing DVDs and introduced video on demand via the internet and grew to 26 million subscribers worldwide. In 2011, Netflix changed its pricing structure and lost 800,000 subscribers. In one quarter. In 2011, Netflix announced plans to begin acquiring original content for its popular subscription streaming service beginning with House of Cards which became the first Emmy Award for web-television. The rise of Netflix has affected the way audiences watch televised content. Question: *What happened to Erol's?*

ⁱ *The Strategic Plan is Dead. Long Live Strategy*; Dana O'Donovan & Noah Rimland Flower, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Jan 10, 2013