



I. Preliminary Preparation – What to Know before You Begin

Guidance and three tools for preparation tasks

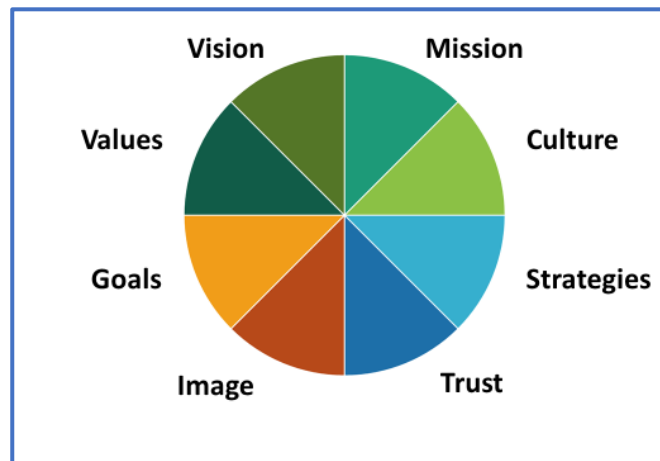
1. What needs to be done in your strategic plan? – A checklist for NGOs
2. How to prepare for your strategic planning retreat? – A checklist for NGOs
3. Agenda for a three-day strategic planning retreat for NGOs – A template

Here are three detailed guides for you as you prepare your overall strategic planning work. The first checklist shows what you need to do, the second checklist includes the organizing, preparing, and planning work to be done, and the final template offers a model agenda or schedule for the actual planning sessions. They are all based on extensive experience with many nonprofits of various sized, programs, and locations.

For best use, please refer and use the lessons contained in my book *Strategic Planning and Culture for Nonprofits: Clear and doable steps to create motivating plans and the supporting culture you need for success*, available on Amazon Books in both paperback and e-book.

Good luck and persevere!

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NGO Futures LLC - Working together through strategy, teamwork and leadership



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1. What needs to be done in your strategic plan? – A checklist

Name _____ Organization/Unit _____ Date _____

Do we have the following in place? Top rating is 5.	Yes or No?	Rate 1 to 5	What will we do to improve our planning?		
			Action	Result	Due Date
1. Energizing vision statement	Yes/No				
2. Empowering mission statement	Yes/No				
3. Strong core values statement	Yes/No				
4. Thorough donor assessment	Yes/No				
5. Insightful competitor analysis	Yes/No				
6. Powerful long-term desired results	Yes/No				
7. Valid SWOT and market analysis	Yes/No				
8. Strategic goals based on critical issues	Yes/No				
9. Memorable strategic positioning statement	Yes/No				
10. Strong credibility statement	Yes/No				
11. Unifying organization culture	Yes/No				
12. Strategy for growth of revenues	Yes/No				
13. Strategy for program innovation	Yes/No				
14. Strategy for efficiency and cost control	Yes/No				
15. Strategy for learning and development	Yes/No				
16. Strategy for advocacy and lobbying	Yes/No				
17. Strategy for board development	Yes/No				
18. Annual objectives and plans for all	Yes/No				
19. Clear progress indicators for all	Yes/No				
20. Annual review scheduled	Yes/No				

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2. Considerations to prepare for your strategic planning – A checklist

This checklist will help you prepare, implement, and follow up your strategic planning process.

Preparation and authorization

1. Is the executive director committed to engage in a strategic planning process?
2. Does he or she accept that the process may lead to substantial changes and new directions?
3. Does he or she accept that the process may bring up awkward issues at times?
4. Do other senior staff members agree to the above as well?
5. Does the board of directors endorse launching a strategic planning process?
6. Is the board of directors willing to engage in the process?
7. Is it clear that the board of directors has the responsibility to approve the final plan?

The strategic planning organizing team

8. Is there a small organizing team that will shepherd the process?
9. Does the organizing team have the right representation and authority?
10. Has the organizing team determined the process, facilitation, and support for the planning?

Internal or external facilitator/consultant

11. Has there been discussion about managing the planning process and facilitating the retreat?
12. If we need an external consultant/facilitator, have the terms of reference been prepared?
13. Have we engaged in a search to find an experienced consultant to facilitate the process?
14. Has an internal or external consultant/facilitator been selected and involved?
15. Have top leaders had an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues with the consultant?

The strategic planning group (retreat participants)

16. Have we created the strategic planning group to carry out the research tasks needed?
17. Does the strategic planning group have a leader? A facilitator? A reporter?
18. Are all those who will be involved in the planning aware of the process and timetable?
19. Has the executive director communicated the importance of honesty in the assessments?
20. Has a plan of action and timetable been prepared and circulated to all who will be involved?
21. Have we personally invited the individuals who will participate in the planning process?

Research and other preparation

22. Have we prepared a comprehensive list of plans, reports, and other materials to be reviewed?
23. Have we identified the key stakeholders to be interviewed?
24. Have we identified the various stakeholder groups to be surveyed?
25. Have we identified the organizations for the competitor assessments?
26. Have we assigned responsibility for those who will conduct the different research tasks?
27. Have we drafted the questions for these interviews? For the surveys?
28. Have we conducted an assessment of our current planning process and results?

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29. Have we invited external experts to talk about the current landscape and the future?

Space and materials

30. Have we organized the meeting place and rooms for full group and small group meetings?

31. Have we organized refreshments and meals and, if needed, accommodations?

32. Have we organized screen and projector, flip charts and markers, pens and paper?

33. Have we organized travel to the facility for the retreat?

Agenda

34. Have we drafted and circulated an agenda with detailed topics to be covered day by day?

35. Have we confirmed those who are doing research will complete their tasks on time?

36. Will we circulate research findings in advance for consideration?

37. Have we confirmed the participants in the retreat?

38. Have we asked people to bring their personal computers for use during the planning?

39. Have we defined the dress code, indicated the expectation to begin on time, and communicated any other requests, suggestions, or helpful information?

Process at the strategic planning retreat itself

40. At the meeting, will we review the agenda, the process to follow, and expected outcomes?

41. Will we assign responsibilities for small-group discussions – leader, facilitator, and reporter?

42. Will we set a standard for plenary and small group discussions to focus on short statements, with active participation by everyone?

43. Will we have a process to allow for needed discussion yet keep the pace moving?

44. Will we allow time for those who conducted research in advance to summarize their findings?

45. Will we assure that one person in each session captures important ideas and conclusions?

46. Will we have a mechanism (PowerPoint projection) to share group reports?

47. Will we have a mechanism (PowerPoint projection) to share and revise draft statements?

48. Will we have a process to resolve or defer for later any contentious or irrelevant issues?

49. As we go through the process, will we review drafts of key items to confirm consensus?

50. Will we be willing to edit previously approved drafts based on new insights?

51. Will we prepare a final draft of the plan with research and working documents as attachments?

After the strategic planning retreat

52. Will we organize needed follow-up activities to complete all plans?

53. Will we conduct meetings with staff to elaborate and reinforce the plan for implementation?

54. Will we organize culture sessions to define the new, desired culture (if we didn't complete this during the retreat)?

55. Will we prepare posters to remind everyone of the vision, mission, culture, positioning, etc.?

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56. Will we give the final draft of the strategic plan to the board for approval?
57. Will we circulate the final, approved strategic plan to all staff and volunteers?
58. Will we publicize the plan to key stakeholders?
59. Will we keep the plan on everyone's desk as a living document to reinforce its implementation?



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3. Agenda for a three-day strategic planning retreat – A template

Participants (list names and responsibility): _____

Location (specify address and contact points): _____

Dates (specify latest arrival and earliest departure times): _____

PRELIMINARY DAY: Getting started

1. Arrival no later than 5:00 pm
2. Gathering and reception at 6:00 pm
 - a. Welcome and setting the agenda and tone for the meeting – executive director
3. Working dinner and group discussion – 7:00-8:30 pm – facilitator (optional session)
 - a. What do *we* want personally from this meeting? 3-5 individual objectives
 - b. What does *our group* want organizationally from this meeting? 3-5 organization objectives
4. Feedback after dinner – 8:30-10:00 pm – facilitator
 - a. Feedback on what we want from this meeting, individually and for the organization
 - b. The value of strategic planning
 - i. Determine the future of the organization
 - ii. Clarify for others who we are, what we do, and how we do it
 - iii. Create the basis for fundraising and for partnerships
 - iv. Work more effectively and efficiently toward our goals
 - c. What we will do at this meeting? What are the issues to address? (schedule, details, etc.)

DAY ONE: Taking stock – understanding realities we face and possibilities we could achieve

1. Breakfast – 8:00-9:00 am
2. **Assessing where we are** – 9:00 am-1:00 pm
 - a. Our history: where we come from – executive director (capture key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - b. Recent evaluations and reports on what we have achieved – staff as assigned
 - i. Annual reports on achievements
 - ii. Other substantive reports and evaluations: Lessons learned (capture key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - c. Survey results on program participants, donors, partners, authorities, prospects, and staff – staff as assigned (capture key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - d. Our competitors and what we learn from them – staff as assigned (capture key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides) – staff who compiled the research
 - e. Our current donors and what we can learn from them – staff as assigned (capture key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides) – staff who compiled the research

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- f. Analysis of program director, fundraising director, and finance/administrative director (capture key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides) – the directors in turn
- g. Findings and recommendations from the confidential interviews – consultant (capture key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
- h. How did we do in our current strategic plan? Group discussion and feedback – facilitator
 - i. What worked and why
 - ii. What did not work and why (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
3. Working lunch – 1:00-2:00 pm – Review from the outside (the landscape we face) – invited guests (capture key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides) – executive director
4. **Where do we want to be** – 2:00-6:00 pm
 - a. Dreams and aspirations – What I would love to see us do in the future (visionary session) (capture key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides) – facilitator
 - b. Donors and other key stakeholders assessment – groups and plenary feedback
 - i. Identify main stakeholder groups
 - ii. Go to the next level of individuals in the various groups
 - iii. Identify what we want from them and what they want from us (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - c. Desired long-term results in ten to fifteen years – groups and plenary feedback
 - i. Stretching our thinking if we had all the resources we needed
 - ii. Results and measurements (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - d. Discussion of the process so far
5. Reception, dinner, and working groups – 7:00-9:30 pm (optional sessions)
 - a. Discussions on program with participants from other departments
 - b. Discussions on marketing and fundraising with participants from other departments
 - c. Discussions on finance and administration with participants from all departments
 - d. Confirming benefits for key stakeholders

DAY TWO: Setting the framework to move forward – drafting the strategic plan

1. Breakfast – 8:00-9:00 am
2. **What we will do** – 9:00 am-1:00 pm – facilitator
 - a. Review of the work so far and feedback from working groups (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - b. Draft our vision – groups and plenary consensus (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - c. Draft our mission – groups and plenary consensus (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - d. Draft our core values – groups and plenary (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - e. Conduct our SWOT – groups and plenary feedback (capture all key findings in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - i. Internal strengths and weaknesses

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- ii. External opportunities and threats
 - iii. Discussion of how to respond to weaknesses, threats, strengths, opportunities
 - f. Identify the critical issues we face for the next three to five years – groups and plenary based on the research, stakeholder analysis, SWOT, and all the other information (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
3. Working lunch – 1:00-2:00 pm
 - a. Identify the strategic goals for three to five years (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides) – facilitator
4. **How we will proceed** – 2:00-5:00 pm – facilitator
 - a. Key strategies – groups and plenary (capture key points for each topic in flip charts or PowerPoint slides), for example:
 - i. Innovation program strategy – Why, what, where, how, and who?
 - ii. Advocacy and influence strategy – Why, what, where, how, and who?
 - iii. Growth strategy – Why, what, where, how, and who?
 - iv. Partnership strategy – Why, what, where, how, and who?
 - v. Other strategies(Note: the strategies on positioning and credibility could be done by two separate groups.)
 - b. Draft our strategic positioning – groups and plenary or delegated to internal expert
 - i. Name and logo, positioning statement, and slogan (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - c. Draft our credibility statement: How to be trusted – groups and plenary or expert group (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - d. Assess our organization culture – groups and plenary (deferred to later for large staff) (capture key points for each topic in flip charts or PowerPoint slides) (Alternative to do it later)
 - i. Define our current culture
 - ii. Define our new, desired culture
 - iii. Determine how we will reinforce the new culture
5. Reception, dinner, and working groups – 6:00-10:00 pm (optional sessions)
 - a. Financial management working group with participants from other departments (optional session)
 - b. Communications working group with participants from various departments (optional session)
 - c. Capacity building working group with various participants (optional session)

DAY THREE: Establishing what we will do – drafting and implementing operational plans

1. Breakfast – 8:00-9:00 am
2. **Who we are and what we do** – 9:00 am-1:00 pm – facilitator
 - a. Feedback from working groups (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - b. Review the key elements of the strategic planning
 - c. Clarifying or completing any unfinished work on the Strategic Plan

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- d. Brainstorming: Creative session on possible objectives for the coming year (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - e. Assignment of draft objectives to departments to refine objectives – executive director
 - f. Independent and team or department work to draft operational plans
3. Lunch – 1:00-2:00 pm
4. **Drafting the operational plans for the coming year** – 2:00-6:00 pm
- a. Independent and team or department work to draft operational plans
 - b. Connecting to other teams for cooperation needs – plenary
 - c. Feedback on topline objectives and any other issues to be addressed – plenary (capture in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - d. Agreement on next steps to complete the planning – executive director (capture all key points in flip charts or PowerPoint slides)
 - i. Who does what by when after this meeting?
 - ii. Documentation of the meeting
 - iii. Communication of the outcome
 - iv. Projected sources and amounts of revenue
 - v. Organizational structure and budget and staffing issues
 - vi. Future meetings
5. Reception and celebration – 6:00-7:00 pm

