



IV. Drafting Your Strategic Plan – A Toolkit for Creating New Strategic Directions

Guidance and ten worksheets for research tasks

1. Key Issues To Be Addressed
2. Vision
3. Mission
4. Core Values – Short format
5. SWOT
6. Critical Issues
7. Strategic Goals
8. Key Organization Strategy – Short format
9. Strategic Positioning
10. Credibility or Trustworthiness Statement
11. Organization Culture – Short format

The following eleven steps offer worksheets to create your strategic plan. Even a nonprofit with good strategic planning experience will benefit from addressing each of the following steps. Together these steps create the components of your new strategic directions. They guide everyone in everything they do.

The worksheets in this section are P1 to P11 for planning.

Strategic Planning (3 to 5 Years)

1. Vision	Our ideal world
2. Mission	What we do
3. Core Values	Our fundamental beliefs
4. Stakeholders	Whom we serve
5. Critical Issues	What we must solve
6. Strategic Goals	What we must achieve
7. Strategies	How we move forward
8. Strategic Positioning	What makes us special
9. Credibility	Why we can be trusted
10. Organization Culture	How we behave

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Step 1: Review what you accomplished – And what to do next

Capture the most important conclusions from the previous sessions about reality (history, lessons learned, survey findings, competitor assessment, donor assessment, department director analysis, interviews, planning process, landscape), and possibility (dreams, stakeholder assessments, long-term results). This is the basis of all your planning.

P1 WORKSHEET: KEY ISSUES WE MUST ADDRESS

1. How can we plan better (responsibilities)?
2. What do we need to consider in our programs (results)?
3. What do we need to consider in our fundraising and marketing (growth)?
4. What do we need to consider in finance and administration (efficiency)?
5. What do we need to consider in our trustworthiness and positioning (image)?
6. What about promotion, volunteers, education, and advocacy (outreach)?
7. What about issues in culture, staffing, and teamwork (behavior)?
8. What about issues in our governance, leadership, and management (top-level issues)?
9. How else can we organize ourselves to produce better results (impact)?
10. What other issues need to be addressed (no topic off limits)?

Keep in mind the key attributes and essential responsibilities of nonprofit organizations. You may want to share these two charts as you address vision, mission, and values.



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Step 2: Define your vision – What you ideally want to see in the world

Now you are ready to make one of the most important decisions in your planning process – to determine or revise your vision. The vision is your statement of the ideal world you would like to see in the long run for your program and beneficiaries, based on your own dreams and possible long-term results.

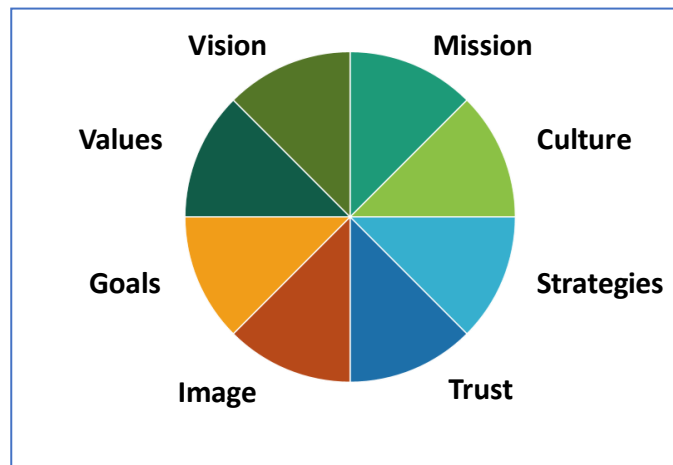
- Is your vision visionary?
- Does it create value for society?
- Is it clear, short, and memorable?
- Does it reflect your group's dreams for the world?
- Will it inspire stakeholders? Donors? Participants? Staff? Others?

P2 WORKSHEET: VISION

What is the vision of our organization?

What is the ideal world we see for those we serve? The organization's vision is a description of the ultimate perfection of what could be – a utopia. It is what we believe the world *should* be. It is a short, memorable, and *inspiring* statement.

Our vision is:



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Step 3: Define your mission – What you actually do to work toward your vision

On the basis of your vision, you can now draft or update your mission – what you do to help achieve your vision. Your mission describes whom you serve, what you do, and how you do that. Your mission statement should be short, memorable, and empowering. I particularly like an *empowering mission* that gives staff, volunteers, donors, participants, and others the power and confidence to achieve the *inspiring vision*. A good mission satisfies these questions:

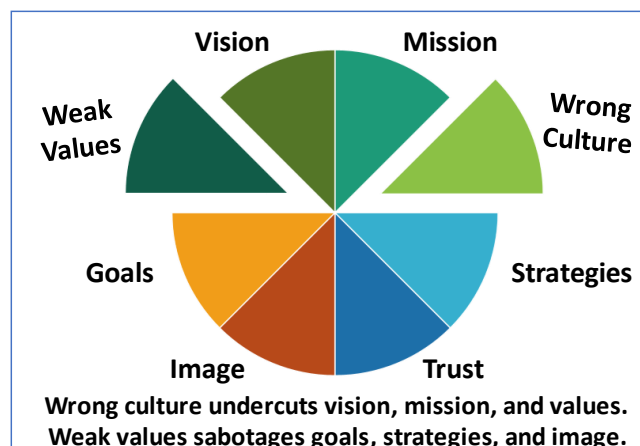
- Is it focused on contribution to the world?
- Does it address the needs of participants?
- Does it achieve worthwhile purposes?
- Is it empowering for stakeholders? Donors? Participants? Staff? Others?
- Does it create a collective “Yes!”?

P3 WORKSHEET: MISSION

What is the mission of our organization?

What do we actually do to achieve our vision? A good mission statement describes whom we serve, what needs we meet, and how we help. It reflects, supports, and contributes to our organization’s vision. It is broad enough to allow flexibility yet provides focus. It is clear and brief enough to remember and serve as a rallying point. What do we do? Whom do we serve? How do we help? It is a short and memorable statement.

Our mission is:



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Step 4: Define or clarify your core values – Values that guide everything you do

Since the world of nonprofits is built on *voluntary* support, the matter of trust is paramount. To be trustworthy, an organization must have a set of core values that guide and shape everything it does. They guide *everything* you do. Values are most effective when they are relatively few in number and stated in a brief and memorable format. I have another set of worksheets that will help you have *strong* core values and *enabling* organization culture.

P4 WORKSHEET: CORE VALUES – Short format

What are our core values?

Core values are the beliefs, norms, and ideas that shape how an organization carries out its mission. They influence activities within the organization and identify the basis of how we treat staff, volunteers, donors, participants, and others. Core values guide us in all we do. State them in just a few words or brief memorable phrases.

Our core values are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

These three statements – vision, mission, and values – are the three most important components in your strategic plan and in your work. They should fit together and reinforce each other.

For a more complete process, please go to section VII on **Strong Values and Energizing Culture: “Must Do” for Nonprofits These Days**. There it is a more complex process designed for use with more staff participation following the strategic planning retreat.

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Step 5: Assess your strengths and weaknesses – And opportunities and threats

Now that you have your vision, mission, and values statements, it is time to analyze your nonprofit's strengths and weaknesses and your opportunities and threats (SWOT) to carry out your organization's work. You should be motivated by the dreams and results sessions, informed by what donors and other stakeholders want, and guided by lessons learned, findings from surveys, and other reports and recommendations.

When conducting your SWOT analysis, everyone must be open and honest about your organization's internal strengths and weaknesses. Planning that is based on inaccurate statements or avoidance of problems is like a house built on sand or even quicksand. The SWOT analysis gets you to focus on what you *can* do and what you *must* do.

P5 WORKSHEET: SWOT ANALYSIS

What are our internal strengths and weaknesses?

What are our external opportunities and threats?

The situation assessment is an honest, thoughtful analysis of the reality in which we work.

- How do we see the situation?
- What are the most important trends?
- What do we do best? Worst?
- What's good? What's not? Be candid!
- Politics, economics, culture, technology?
- What is our competition doing?

The SWOT captures all the assessments and analyses we have done. Fill in all the lines you can.

Our major internal strengths are:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

Our major internal weaknesses are:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

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8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.
11.	11.
12.	12.
13.	13.
14.	14.
15.	15.
Our key outside opportunities are:	Our key outside threats are:
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.
11.	11.
12.	12.

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13.	13.
14.	14.
15.	15.

Once you have completed this assessment, the group should look at what you have identified in each of the four areas of the SWOT analysis. The key challenge here is using your SWOT findings to identify ways to break new ground. You can achieve real breakthroughs in organizational development and growth if you focus on how to:

- Strengthen your strengths
- Overcome your weaknesses
- Take advantage of opportunities
- Turn threats into opportunities

Work with the issues identified in your internal strengths and weaknesses and the external opportunities and threats so you can combine them into critical issues in the next section. Boil them down to a manageable set of issues by combining some and eliminating some to get the best list that describes your current reality.



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Step 6: Identify the critical issues – The issues you must solve

Now it is time for the planning group to review and consider everything from the research you have heard, the analysis you have done, and the results you want achieve, along with the assessment of your capabilities. Critical issues usually relate to programs and services, fundraising and awareness, finance and internal operations, and organizational strengthening and innovation. Expansion, growth, staff competencies, culture, and board development are often on the list. Critical issues for your organization flow directly from your research, creativity, and analysis. They grow into serious problems if you fail to solve them.

P6 WORKSHEET: CRITICAL ISSUES

What critical issues do we *have* to solve?

Critical issues are the five to seven biggest issues we have to solve. Identifying critical issues flows directly from the analysis about our organization, our situation, and our stakeholders. Without identifying and solving these issues, we will not succeed. Critical issues are the issues we must address to survive and perform well.

- Each critical issue is stated in a few words, not a full sentence.
- There will be serious problems if we fail to address these critical issues.
- They are the major issues to focus on for the next few years.
- They are issues we can influence or control.
- For every threat there is an opportunity! For every weakness there is a solution!

Our critical issues are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

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Step 7: Identify the strategic goals for your organization – Strategic goals

Based on the critical issues listed above, you can identify the five to seven strategic goals for your organization for the coming few years. Goals build on your dreams and desired long-term results and are stretching but achievable within a reasonable period. Strategic goals state where you want to be at the end of the time period selected. There are usually goals for programs and services, fundraising and public relations, finance and administration, and organizational strengthening.

Identifying the goals can be a surprisingly quick process, since you can effectively turn the critical issues into achievements.

P7 WORKSHEET: STRATEGIC GOALS

What are our strategic goals?

Strategic goals state where we want to be at the end of the planning period. They are important goals for service delivery, fundraising, and other capacity building for three to five years. Strategic goals are written as accomplishments with a single result and a single focus for each. Our strategic goals are the basis for our operational plans.

- Direct responses to identified critical issues
- General destinations on our mission
- Responses to stakeholder expectations
- What we must have achieved to succeed
- Realistic, stretching, and significant
- Statements of what (not how or why)

Our strategic goals are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

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Step 8: Identify the key organization strategy – Strategy that defines how you move forward

Planning now moves to strategies. Strategies are the roadmap for your work. Strategies indicate *how* you will move forward and *how* you will achieve the results you desire.

At this point in your planning process, I suggest you focus first on identifying and developing just the single most important strategy for the organization. This may be the core organizational strategy or the core program strategy. Keep in mind, however, that *strategy must be supported* with sufficient research, knowledge, and budget. With strategy, we are not dealing in dreams; we are focused on realities and *how* to progress.

This worksheet on organization strategy is intended for new or smaller NGOs. Larger NGOs should also have a statement of their central strategy for the whole organization. It defines the strategy for the organization and fully reflects and carries forward your vision and mission.

P8 WORKSHEET: ORGANIZATION STRATEGY – Short format

What is our key organization strategy?

A strategy is a clear and logical explanation of *how* we will progress (what path, what means). Strategy is the roadmap to arrive at our goals, crafted to fit the special situation of the organization and its stakeholders. Identifying strategies requires creativity and insight. Strategy is the basis for our decisions, setting objectives and priorities, and allocating resources.

Our key organization strategy is:

Rather than exploring the many important strategies for fundraising and marketing here which I presented in my book **25 Proven Strategies for Fundraising Success: How to win the love and support of donors** for a more complete process on strategy, go to [Worksheet VIII. Developing the Right Strategies for Fundraising Success.](#)

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Step 9: Define your positioning – Who you are and how you present yourself

You have a vision of the world, a mission of your work, your strategic goals, and your key strategy. But who are you? It is important for your organization to define itself clearly and simply. In this way, you position yourself in the field of your activity for program and in the marketplace for funding. What appeals to stakeholders about your organization? How do you differentiate yourself? What is unique and special about you?

When it comes to positioning, we know from advertising studies that when people shop they tend to respond to products whose names they know and whose image or reputation they like. Your strategic positioning includes your organization's name and logo, a brief description of who you are, and a slogan (or tagline). Together, these communicate to your various publics your uniqueness and importance.

P9 WORKSHEET: STRATEGIC POSITIONING

What is our desired image or strategic positioning (unique value added)?

Our strategic positioning shows who we are and how we are attractive to stakeholders. Donors pay us to perform a service. They could give their funds to another nonprofit or business. We are in competition with other organizations for awareness and funds, and the competition is severe. We want to appeal to donors with something special and add more value to a donor's gift than their other expenditures could. We need to think of our uniqueness, the value of our work, and how we communicate these points. This is our strategic positioning and brand, which together form our image.

Our name is:

Our logo is:

Our positioning or identity is:

Our slogan or tagline is:

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Step 10: Draft a credibility statement – Why people can trust you

Based on your values and key strategies, you should also draft a credibility statement, which states how you demonstrate your values and warrant the trust of donors. Stakeholders expect a nonprofit to be effective, efficient, trustworthy, and accountable.

A credibility statement can include publishing a comprehensive annual report, externally audited financial statements, a code of ethics with no conflicts of interests, and other indicators of trustworthy behavior. Other key elements to deserve trust include: truthful fundraising appeals, use of funds according to donor expectations, and more as described in the book. The organization's leadership should also work to build a culture of trustworthiness and accountability.

P10 WORKSHEET: CREDIBILITY OR TRUSTWORTHINESS

What is our credibility statement to convince stakeholders they can *trust* us?

Why should anyone trust us? Stakeholders need to trust us to give us their money, time, work, advice, and other forms of support. What are the key elements of our trustworthiness? What about our history, results, integrity, management, governance, finances, audits, accountability, diversity, transparency, reporting, endorsements, assurances, practices, donor service, and code of ethics? We need a credibility statement to demonstrate we are trustworthy.

A credibility statement can include, as a minimum, developing and publishing a comprehensive annual report, externally audited financial statements, a code of ethics with no conflicts of interests, and other indicators of trustworthy behavior.

We state the following as our commitment to accountability and trustworthiness:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

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Step 11: Identify your organization culture – How you will behave

Culture builds on the organization's core values. Culture is how you behave and work together. A clear statement of your organization culture guides the behavior of everyone involved in the organization's work and also communicates to potential donors how the organization behaves. I have seen that the wrong kind of culture can completely undercut or sabotage even the best strategic and operational plans. Honesty is important to accurately identify the current culture and then draft a new, desired culture that fully supports the new strategic goals.

For a more complete process, please go to section **VII. Establishing Strong Values and Energizing Culture – “Must Do” for All Nonprofits These Days**. The more complex process there is designed for use with more staff participation following the strategic planning retreat.

P11 WORKSHEET: ORGANIZATION CULTURE – short format

What is our desired organization culture to support our plans?

Culture is the glue that binds people together and gives us a way of behaving and working together. Organization culture unifies vision, mission, values, and people.

- What behaviors currently exist?
- How should these change?
- What is desired for fundraising?

What is our desired organization culture? Our new, desired culture is:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Our plan to reinforce the new culture is:

