

What is a Strategic Plan?

There are many definitions and models for strategic planning. Some commonly accepted characteristics of a strategic plan are that:

- it deals with fundamental questions such as: Who are our clients? Who should be our clients?
- it provides a framework for day to day detailed planning;
- it typically involves a time frame of two to five years (sometimes more or less depending on the nature of the organisation);
- it provides coherence to an organisation's actions and decisions over time;
- it is an activity that must inevitably involve all levels of management, for example, Board, management committees, managers and coordinators.

One strategic planning model includes the following ten steps. The weighting given to each step may vary depending on the nature of the organisation and its planning needs.

A. WHAT ARE WE DOING?

1. Define the purpose and mission of the organisation. This may involve the development of a mission statement. A mission statement is a statement that answers the following questions:

- Who are we?
- What needs do we intend to meet?
- Whose need?
- What do we intend to do to meet the needs, ie what services do we intend to provide?
- What are our central values? (e.g. What do we believe in? What are we committed to? What is our philosophy?)

Mission statements can be as short as a sentence or a paragraph. They are useful because they can be an agreed basis on what the organisation is about.

In a new project or service it is important to identify what is intended to happen. In an existing project or service it is important to identify what is actually happening at the moment. Whether what is happening should continue will become a question throughout the strategic planning process and especially in steps 7 and 8.

2. Identify current aims, objectives and strategy of the organisation.

The aims of the organisation are general statements of what it intends to achieve.

Objectives are also statements of what the organisation intends to achieve, however they are usually also specific, measurable, attainable and time bound.

The strategy is the description of how the objectives are going to be met.

B. STRUCTURED BRAINSTORMING

3. Environmental analysis. The purpose of an environmental analysis is to identify the ways changes in the environment can indirectly influence the organisation.

The environment could include other services, funding bodies, other projects, government policy, community attitudes, and so on.

4. Resource analysis. This would include a statement of all resources that are available for the development of the organisation. What resources are available to implement the aims and objectives of the organisation? Resource analysis is also likely to include an analysis of the organisations strengths and weaknesses. Organisations can often successfully build on their strengths and develop strategies to minimise the negative effects of their weaknesses.

5. Stakeholder analysis. Who are the stakeholders? What are their needs? Wants? Expectations? Key stakeholders may include funding bodies, clients, staff, management committee members and volunteers. These people have a variety of views values and needs that will have an influence on the plans that are developed.

6. Identification of strategic opportunities and threats. These are the opportunities and threats that arise outside the organisation.

C. CREATIVE LEAP

7. Identifying strategic choices. After the environment has been analysed and the strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and threats have been reviewed it is possible to better see the results of the existing strategy. The organisation can then identify strategic choices - whether or not to develop new strategies or modify the existing strategy.

D. DECISION MAKING

8. Strategic Decision-making
Choosing among the possible options.

E. ACTION and REFLECTION

9. Implementation
Once the most appropriate strategy has been chosen it is implemented.

10. Evaluation
Evaluation the implementation and the level of success of the implementation of the strategy.