Create a strategic plan

Update Regularly
The strategic plan should be a living document. For small groups, we recommend creating a plan annually and updating it every three to six months.

The strategic plan is the most important document of your organization. It clarifies how your everyday activities tie into your vision for the future. When it is done, you should print it out and look at it every day.

It is possible to spend a great deal of time creating a strategic plan. The approach described here is simple and easy to implement. Following these guidelines, a small group can quickly create a workable plan and begin implementing it immediately. Larger organizations may need to spend more time in preparation and planning.

Preparation

Your organization should prepare for the planning meeting by considering the information collected from your stakeholders. Analyze what they see as the major

The Basics
Set aside time to discuss for at least a few hours or a day. Ask everyone to turn off cell phones and stop checking email, and post large sheets of paper up on the wall where you draw the plan. Ideally, it's best to have an experienced facilitator from outside the organization run the meeting, as she or he will be more objective and can help to resolve any conflicts.

strengths and weaknesses of your group's approach, as well as the greatest opportunities and risks to your work. You may not agree with all of their comments, but this consultation will give you a clearer picture of how others see your work.

Based on this input and feedback, you should be able to identify a few key issues that need to be addressed in the planning process. You may even want to invite one or more stakeholders to participate in the planning meeting and share their thoughts with the entire team.

The Process

Everyone, including the board, staff and volunteers, should provide input into your organization's plan. This is a chance for everyone to agree on the shared goals of your organization, and for individuals in the organization to understand why everyone should work together as a team for the rest of the year. It is also important because if we want to build a more just and egalitarian society, we have to begin in our own organizations, by valuing and respecting every individual's right to participation and right to freedom of expression. Useful ideas can come from every part of the organization.

Begin the planning meeting with a discussion about the current environment for your organization's work. Ask someone to present briefly on any major new developments, such as significant policy changes that affect your work. Have someone else sum up, either in writing or verbally, the programs from the past year and what the organization's experience has been with them. This provides some background so that planning does not happen in a vacuum.

The Logic Model

Before creating your strategic plan based on Asia Catalyst's logic model, you need to know a few key points about this tool:

1. First, note that the Logic Model has five parts: vision, outcomes, outputs, actions and resources. Note also that these parts represent different periods of time. The vision statement is 20 years into the future, outcomes are 5-10 years into the future, outputs are 2-3 years into the future, and actions occur in the present, or the current year.

2. Second, when we read books, we typically read from left to right. But when we use the strategic planning logic model, we read from right to left. We start with the vision statement and work backwards to outcomes to outputs to actions and to resources. The sequence in which we read the logic model is important.

3. The logic model is a conceptual tool that helps you visualize your strategic plan. With it, you can draw the connection from your organization's resources, actions, outputs and outcomes to the ultimate goal that your group wants to achieve in your community, the vision. It is a good way to assess your programs.

VISION I 20-Year Goal

This is the ultimate vision of your organization, the thing that motivated you to start doing this work in the first place. It should be even simpler than your mission statement: a short, clear statement of only one or two sentences that describes what you hope will be the end result of your work. It should be ambitious and inspirational. Good examples: "End homelessness in Beijing," "All courts in Indonesia sentence drug users to rehabilitation, not prison." Make sure you have consensus in the entire organization about this statement. If people find it difficult to come up with this statement, ask them to visualize a world in which your group's work is no longer necessary, and describe it in one sentence. See **How To Draft A Vision Statement**.

Compared to vision statements, outcomes are smaller changes – they are still significant changes to the environment or society, but they are not quite as large as a vision statement. They are objectives that you can achieve within 5-10 years. Generally, we say that small NGOs should have 3-4 outcomes – more than that might be too much to accomplish with limited resources in 5-10 years – as we want to be both idealistic and realistic.

Outcomes should also be things that you can measure, observe or evaluate. Ask yourself, after 5-10 years, how will we know whether or not this change has occurred?

If there is no clear answer, then it is not measurable.

Some poor examples: "More homeless people know about their rights" or "the national government improves policies on drug users." Better examples include: "Build new homes for 500 homeless families in New York City" or "All hospitals in our province will provide methadone to patients who are recovering injection drug users."

Bad Example 1: More homeless people know about their rights.

Good Example 1: Build new homes for 500 homeless families in New York City.

Explanation: The Good Example has a data point to measure the outcome and "build new homes" is observable.

Bad Example 2: The national government improves its policies concerning drug users.

Good Example 2: All hospitals in our province will provide methadone to patients who are recovering injection drug users

Explanation: In the Good Example, "all hospitals" is a measurable indicator. The change described is also more concrete and observable compared with the bad example.

The good examples above are statements that are ambitious, but also clearly measurable. This is also a time to return to the inputs you received during the preparation phase and to evaluate your organization's work last year. Are there things your organization does especially well? Are there things you do now that other groups do better? Are the outcomes building on your existing experiences, and your organization's strengths and resources?

Outputs | 2-Year Goals

Now let's look at outputs – these are the direct result of the program work that you are doing this year. They are smaller steps – things that you can accomplish within 2-3 years – on the way to achieving 5-10 year outcomes. Outputs should be specific, measurable and able to be evaluated.

Bad Example: Raise sex workers' awareness of safety and health.

Good Example: 85% of the sex workers to whom we have conducted outreach have a correct understanding of the transmission of HIV and use condoms regularly.

As shown in the Good Example, sometimes it helps to use specific numbers or percentages when writing outputs. This is often the most difficult part of the process, because it is the part where vision meets reality. Most organizations spend a lot of time on this column.

In this column, you need to come up with achievable results of your work in the next two years. Each output is a goal that should lead clearly to at least one of your 5-year outcomes. Likewise, each outcome should have at least one output that connects to it. You will need to make tough choices in this section and be honest about what you can really achieve with the staff and funding you currently have. You also

What's the difference?
Outcomes are goals that are achievable in 5-10 years, while Outputs are achievable results of your work in the next two years. Outputs are smaller steps that will lead to the achievement of outcomes.

have to be sure that your outputs logically result from what your organization actually does. This is where common sense becomes important.

Why these specific names – "output," "outcome," etc.? These words are frequently used by donors and governments to evaluate NGO programs. If we think in the language of donors, we can use the strategic plan to communicate our work with donors in a way that they understand.

For instance, if all your outcomes (5-10 year goals) are about legal and policy change, but all your current programs are services such as providing food and medical care,

then the plan is not logical and something will have to change. Some people like to use very specific numbers here. Others prefer to be indefinite. Either one is fine, but try not to have more than 5-8 outputs. For a small organization, eight outputs is a lot to accomplish in two years.

One challenge of drafting outputs is to confuse the concept with outcomes. See **How to Differentiate Outputs and Outcomes** for further learning.

Compared with outputs and outcomes, actions are much more simple. These are just the different activities and programs that you are doing this year. Actions will produce outputs. You do not have to worry as much about measurement and evaluation when writing actions, as actions are more about process than results, but you should still make them as specific as possible. Do not just say you are going to hold "training" – indicate how many training sessions, for whom, covering what material, etc. Once the Vision, Outcomes and Outputs columns are done, this part is easy. For instance, if your output is "40 people trained in legal rights," your action may be "two legal rights workshops for 20 people each." Each action should have at least one arrow pointing to an output. Try to be as specific as possible, using concrete numbers.

> **Bad Example**: Outreach
> **Good Example**: Provide five outreach sessions every month for migrant sex workers.
> **Explanation**: The Bad Example makes the mistake of being not specific.

Resources | What You've Got

In this column, you brainstorm about people who can help you get this done: current and potential funders who might support your work, other NGOs that can share resources with you, university programs that might sponsor events, experts who might help with training, etc. List all of the people to whom you need to reach out in order to organize your programs. You can also list all of the current resources you have: office space, computers, printers and other items that help you do your work. The resources you find out in **How to Map the Field** can be applied in this section. The nice part about this step is that it is a reminder that while the tasks ahead are ambitious, your organization is not alone.

Bad Example: Provincial government, UN Agencies, Experts

Good Example: Beijing Disabled Persons Association, WHO Beijing Office, Zhang San (legal consultant on employment), UNAIDS Beijing Office

Explanation: Resources should be as detailed as possible. This way you can see who to approach when you are looking for related resources.
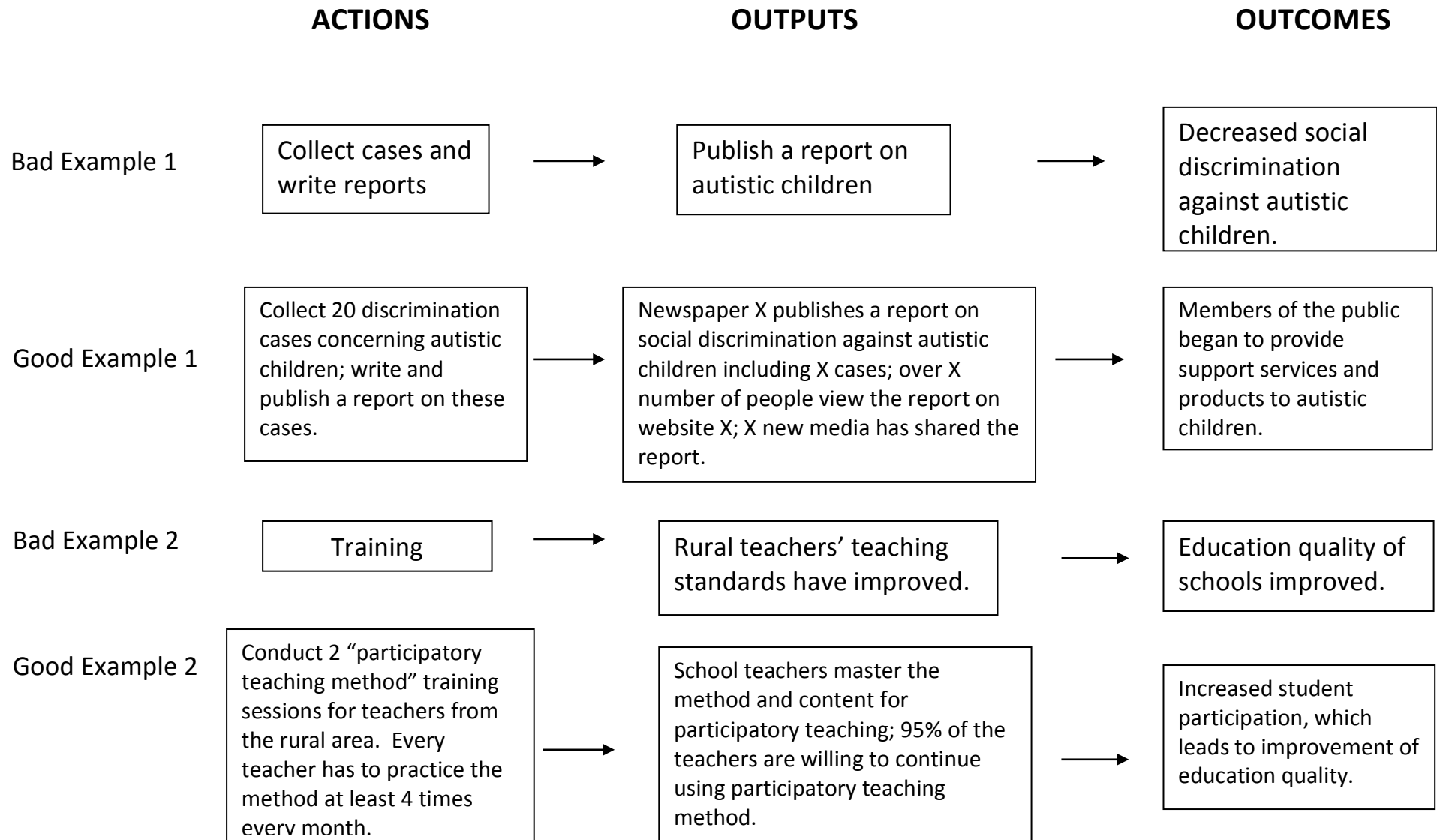
How to Use the Logic Model

Move from right to left, filling in one column at a time. Start by reviewing your vision and make sure you all still agree with it, then move to the left and discuss outcomes, then outputs, and then actions. Try not to think about the actions (programs for this year) until you finish the columns to the right of it.

The number one mistake most groups make is to make decisions about this year's programs before the other columns on the right are done.

If you find during this planning meeting that you are making tough decisions and deciding not to do certain things that you really wanted to do, then you are doing this correctly. That is at the core of planning: evaluating what resources you have and making realistic choices.

In the following pages, we have provided two examples to show how to build logical connections between the elements in the logic model.

	ACTIONS	**OUTPUTS**	**OUTCOMES**
Bad Example 1	Collect cases and write reports →	Publish a report on autistic children →	Decreased social discrimination against autistic children.
Good Example 1	Collect 20 discrimination cases concerning autistic children; write and publish a report on these cases. →	Newspaper X publishes a report on social discrimination against autistic children including X cases; over X number of people view the report on website X; X new media has shared the report. →	Members of the public began to provide support services and products to autistic children.
Bad Example 2	Training →	Rural teachers' teaching standards have improved. →	Education quality of schools improved.
Good Example 2	Conduct 2 "participatory teaching method" training sessions for teachers from the rural area. Every teacher has to practice the method at least 4 times every month. →	School teachers master the method and content for participatory teaching; 95% of the teachers are willing to continue using participatory teaching method. →	Increased student participation, which leads to improvement of education quality.

Finalizing the Plan

Take one more look before finalizing your plan:

1. Does every box have an arrow that points to another box?
2. Is there a logical relationship between each part of the plan?
3. Will the actions result in the outputs ?
4. Will the outputs lead naturally to the outcomes?
5. Have you included every one of your programs?

Logic Model Basics

☑ Every box in the Logic Model must be filled in; no blank boxes! But you can change the number of boxes.

☑ Every box must be connected to another box; no islands! The arrows connecting boxes represent cause and effect: Actions produce outputs; outputs lead to outcomes; outcomes enable the vision statement to be achieved. There is a logical relationship between these different parts.

Next Steps

We recommend doing a few drafts of the plan internally, and then showing the plan to a few individuals outside of the organization to get their feedback before you make the plan official. Finally:

1. Create a monthly timeline. Create a spreadsheet with actions on the left, and the months across the top. Plan out the steps for each action each month. Decide who will be responsible for each action. If no one wants to be responsible for it, it should be removed from the strategic plan. See **How To Create A Timeline**.
2. Create an annual budget. Create a spreadsheet with actions on the left and the cost of each action in the next column. See **How To Create A Budget and Template| Budget**.

3. Send the plan to your donors. Donors appreciate seeing the big picture of your work and how the projects they support fit into your long-term strategy.
4. Post the plan, budget and timeline in the office where you, your colleagues and visitors can see it each day.
5. Review the plan and see whether you are making progress in six months. Are the actions leading to the outputs you planned? Why or why not? If they are not having the result you intended them to have, you may need to reevaluate whether or not these are the right actions.