The relationship between a Strategic Plan and Time Management

As discussed in the previous chapter, a strategic plan decides the general direction of an organization. Once finalized, the next step is to implement the action part of the plan. The implementation of actions requires prudent time management. Please read the diagram below and think about how a strategic plan directs time management and how time management can help you accomplish the actions listed in the strategic plan. This diagram was shown for the first time in the strategic planning chapter, but you should consider it again now and consider questions brought up in this section.

Challenges of Time Management

When managing an organization, you will meet many challenges, such as difficulties in controlling your schedule. Have you ever experienced situations such as:

- A planned activity will not be finished within the expected time;
- Your program partner did not finish their work within the appointed time, which results in insufficient time to finish the whole program;
- Many things are happening at the same time and you do not know how to prioritize.

In order to avoid any situation stated above, we need to make timelines. Apart from providing control over your schedule, a timeline can also:

- ✓ Document or mark clearly the activities that are planned within a period of time;
- ✓ Plan for the future;
- ✓ Assign work to staff and build a sense of responsibilities;
- ✓ Manage time effectively;
- ✓ Evaluate work processes;
- ✓ Plan for multiple responsibilities;
- ✓ Avoid staff burn-out.

The major steps of time management include:

1. Make an annual plan for the entire organization and specify major activities for each month;
2. Manage each month's tasks – this can be done in many ways, but you need to choose how to do it based on your workload and the time available.

Making a Timeline

Things to consider while making timelines:

- ✓ Relationship between timeline and strategic plan;
- ✓ Detailed activities;
- ✓ Cause and effect relationship;
- ✓ Division of responsibilities.

Steps

1. Draw a chart on a flipchart, horizontally from left to right.
2. List all activities in the left column and months across the top row.
3. Think about how much time is needed to prepare for each activity or project, and write the steps in the appropriate month.
4. Decide the person in charge for each activity or action and label it on the timeline after the task.

Please read the timeline below carefully. What do you think of it?

Timeline example: HIV/AIDS Education Organization

Action	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sep and after
1. Reports on Rights Discrimination		Consult with allies and other groups	Map the field for the project	Conduct research and interviews			Create report outline	Write report	Printing
2. Law workshops	Create legal rights manual		Legal rights workshop #1	Follow up with workshop participants	Continue follow up with workshop participants				
3. Outreach to PLHIV	Party at local community center	Street outreach	Street outreach	Party at local community center	Street outreach	Street outreach	Workshop on living with HIV		
4. Fundraising		Small dinner for potential donors		Deadline for Ford Foundation grant application		Ford Foundation grant report due		PLHIV Panel and reception	

You will find out a few problems after reading the timeline carefully:

- ✓ The work break down structure is clear and logical;
- × The time arrangement is not very reasonable – most activities are scheduled in the first four months. When planning for activities, make sure they are spread throughout the timeline, if possible, in order not to overload staff during a certain period of time. In addition, make sure each activity is given sufficient time to be implemented.
- × The people responsible of each task are missing – when making timelines, add the responsible person after the task so that you can see clearly who is responsible for a given task, when reviewing the timeline. Also, adding this makes the workload for each staff member easy to see. In the appendix, we have provided **Template| Timeline**, in which there is a row for Responsible Person to avoid missing this information. Next, we will introduce another timeline tool which shows the relationship between the Responsible Person, the program schedule and activities — the **Gantt Chart**.