Basic Principles of Strategic Plans

Strategic planning requires taking a thorough look at:

- Who you are as an organization — your resources, capacities, advantages, disadvantages, etc.
- Your operating environment — your clients, supporters, opportunities, threats, etc.

Once you know where you stand, you may start creating your vision for the future and assembling a strategic plan for achieving that vision.

Now, how can we understand the term “strategic plan”?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nouns</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The most important document for an organization;</td>
<td>• Developing and translating strategic thoughts into a written document;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Defines who you are, what you want to realize, and how you want to realize it;</td>
<td>• Reaching consensus among all staff and volunteers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connects your work and your vision together.</td>
<td>• Assessing the organization’s capacity and making tough decisions for its development.</td>
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The Importance of Strategic Plans

✓ A strategic plan can help to prevent mission drift, by serving as a guide by which you can assess whether your current work is helping you realize your final vision.

✓ A strategic plan can strengthen your program management skills. The plan is not an end in itself, but is actually a tool that serves as the foundation of strong program management. For example, you can use your strategic plan to create timelines and budgets.

✓ A strategic plan can clearly describe what you are not going to do. Small NGOs have very limited resources; therefore, they cannot do everything at once or do everything that they want to do, so they have to make choices. Strategic planning can help us make these choices by identifying priority areas and what needs to come first.

✓ A strategic plan can bring your team together. Strategic planning is not something that the director of an organization does alone. Instead, it is a process that requires the meaningful participation of all of your staff to complete. Why? If you complete the plan alone, your staff and volunteers may not buy into it. You want to solicit everyone’s opinions and participation when deciding the future direction of your organization:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Without A Strategic Plan</th>
<th>Leader Makes the Strategic Plan</th>
<th>All Staff Make the Strategic Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic thinkers</strong></td>
<td>Not clear</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>All staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Input to Strategic Planning</strong></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High, but controllable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Output of Strategic Plan</strong></td>
<td>Stays around the changing strategic thoughts in mind</td>
<td>Strategic plan with strong characteristics of the leaders</td>
<td>Plan document that combines the thoughts of all of the staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Direction</strong></td>
<td>Not specified, easy to drift, do whatever comes to mind</td>
<td>Specified, but it costs a lot to communicate with the staff</td>
<td>Leaders and staff reached consensus, won’t drift easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Input of Staff</strong></td>
<td>Quite lost</td>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Actions</strong></td>
<td>Disordered</td>
<td>Weak, resistance and simply obeying</td>
<td>Strong, high participation of staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>