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This section of the OIK outlines the centrality of planning and outlines the planning process. For further support in relation to strategic planning we would encourage you to attend a strategic planning workshop or contact us in relation to consultancy.

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# Strategic Planning: an Overview

Strategic planning is the process of documenting and defining an organisations approach to achieving desired outcomes.

Strategic Planning is a feature of good practice in community organisations. It provides:

* A strong structure to determine priorities over several years
* Guidance for staff to help maintain the organisation's direction
* A monitoring tool for the board/committee

A strategic plan can be for any length of time - in the community sector it is usually about three years, but it might also be up to five or longer. In order to plan and determine the priorities and direction of an organisation it’s important to understand the current position, what things look like at present, where you would like to see the organisation in 1 to 3 to 5 years, and what then is required to reach the desired destination.

# The Importance of Planning

Some organisations resist strategic planning and insist they know what they are doing without spending time and resources creating a strategic plan. It is "obvious" what they need to do - and they just do it.

Other reasons for not strategic planning include:

* The intensity of day to day activities, with no time to "waste" on planning
* Instability in funding and staffing make it hard to think about the future
* It seems too "private sector" to have a strategic plan
* Some board or staff members might be threatened by the idea of doing things differently
* Strategic planning has been tried before, and it didn't work.

All of the reasons above are very good reasons why there *should* be a strategic plan. For example:

* strategic planning could be used to identify why the organisation is overloaded, and point to better structures to deal with the workload
* strategic planning helps build stability, and even plan for uncertainty
* Not-for-profits have less resources than the private sector and have to manage them more creatively and strategically
* a strategic plan help prevent any single person, including the Executive Officer, from pushing pet projects or agendas
* if a previous strategic planning process was not a success, learn from the exercise. It is likely the process used was not suited to the organisation.

Think of the time put into strategic planning as an investment or insurance policy. Even one day set aside for planning can improve an organisation's chances of survival in the future.

# Strategic Planning: Process

The process of strategic planning can vary between organisations; however, there are some steps that can be included in each process to ensure a useful working document is produced.

**1. What does the organisation stand for?**

* Check that the vision or mission statement is still applicable or whether it needs adjustment. Sometimes it may need complete revision, although this is not usually the case. Often the language is just a bit stale and needs modification. For more information see [Vision, Mission and Values](#_Vision,_Mission_and).
* Identify the ethical framework of the organisation by clarifying the organisations values and beliefs. The framework will inform the priorities that are determined for the plan.
* Check against the Objects in your constitution, they are your original guide to the reason for your organisation existing.

**2. What has the organisation learnt?**

* Reflect on work that has been achieved and lessons learnt, refer to the previous version of the strategic plan and work plan to help.
* Keep in mind any structural changes that you have made, including growth and major change. This helps to ground your process in knowing where you are right now before you move forward.

**3. What does the organisation want to achieve?**

* What are your key areas of work? Think about the main parts of your organisation and the underlying direction of those areas.
	+ Don't forget your internal processes like governance and management when doing this.
* What actions would you like to undertake to progress those key areas over the next few years?
	+ Be realistic when doing this so that you can actually achieve what you set out to do. Keep the list within your resource capacity.

Strategic planning isn't rocket science but it does take commitment and a strong understanding of your organisation and its capacities. It will help you to identify key targets for membership growth, and funding sources.

Most importantly, strategic planning provides your organisation with an independent sense of direction and that helps to build resilience. Rather than simply reacting to external forces you have some control of your agenda and what comes next.

A helpful tool in this process is the Organisational Development Toolkit developed by QCOSS. The toolkit consists of three self-assessment tools that focus on key capabilities and assist organisations to review their current capability and prepare for the future. <http://communitydoor.org.au/sector-readiness/organisational-development-toolkit>

Further support with Strategic Planning is available through our **workshops** or through **consultancy**.

# Effective Strategic Planning

## Vision, Mission and Values

Effective strategic planning begins with having a vision, a mission and organisational values. In a planning process it is worth reviewing and refocusing attention on vision, mission and values.

**Vision:** Identifies what the organisation **“wants the future to be”**

**Mission:** outlines the purpose of an organization, the **“why we exist”** and the things that an organisation does to meet its vision.

**Values:** The values of an organisation specify **“what we believe”**;it is the values of an organisation that drive its culture.

**Strategy:** The strategy is then the **“how to win”** component which is a road map for the organisation’s successful journey towards the desired vision.

Strategic Planning involves assessing the current situation, establishing a target or goal and then mapping some action to achieve the desired target.

**Situation – Target – Proposal**

* **Situation** - Evaluate the current situation and how it came about. Environmental Scan.
* **Target** - Define goals and objectives (sometimes called ideal / desired state).
* **Proposal** - Map a possible route to the goals and objectives. Action Planning.

## Assessing the Situation

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is a common way to assess the current situation of an organisation.

New thinking has emerged that moves away from SWOT toward a new acronym—SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results). The focus is on the organisation and the future rather than perceived threats and/or weaknesses. When conducting a SOAR analysis, the following questions should be asked:

* What are our greatest strengths?
* What are our best opportunities?
* What is our preferred future?
* What are the measurable results that will tell us we’ve achieved that preferred future?

**THE BENEFITS**One primary advantage to using SOAR is the staff’s level of involvement. SWOT usually involves only senior-level personnel in strategic planning. In contrast, SOAR uses a strengths-based approach called appreciative inquiry (AI).

With AI, the planning process involves every level from the senior manager to the newly hired employee. The idea behind SOAR is to get an all-inclusive view to the strategic planning process that aligns strengths with opportunities, aspirations and desired results. In theory, resistance to change is minimized, and with ownership, there’s a commitment to turn the goals into action.

## Acquiring the Target

The next of the process involves setting the goals or desired outcomes. When setting goals it is important to make sure they are SMART.

**S –** Specific – what exactly are you aiming to achieve?

**M –** Measurable – how will you know the organisation has achieved this goal?

**A –** Attainable – is the goal realistic?

**R –** Relevant – is the goal aligned to the organisation’s vision, mission and values?

**T –** Timed – does the goal include a timeframe?

## Creating the Strategy

Once you have identified achievable goals or desired outcomes for the next three to five years, creating the strategy is about identifying the path the organisation will take to move from the current situation to reach the goals that have been set.

Strategic Plans outline all the information gathered in the process so far and identify key areas of focus that inform the way in which the goals identified will be approached and achieved.

These key areas can then form the basis of work plans and staff performance review which helps to implement and embed the plan in the day to day working of the organisation.

There are also a number of strategic planning tools that can support the creation of a plan.

The ACTCOSS strategic plan is an example.

The following links provide more in depth information relating to the development of a strategic plan <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning> <https://www.ourcommunity.com.au/management/view_help_sheet.do?articleid=739> and http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRREGTOPTEIA/Resources/mosaica\_10\_steps.pdf

# Strategic Planning and Work Planning

The Strategic Plan provides high level goals that drive the direction and priorities of the organisation. The strategic plan informs what programs and services will be developed or maintained, what might be recalibrated or re-directed.

These high level decisions also impact individual, team and program work plans. The key areas and strategies adopted in the strategic plan can be adopted at every level. Connecting the work plans of individuals and teams to the organisational strategy provides meaningful work for staff and volunteers and also ensures that the organisation takes steps toward reaching the goals identified in the planning process.

For further information you can look at the HR strategic framework section of the OIK and for support you can contact ACTCOSS about strategic planning consultancy.

# Glossary of Strategic Planning Terms

Strategic planning guides and training often uses a range of special terms or “jargon” to refer to particular ideas or processes. There are no definitive meanings for many of these terms, and same term can have different meanings across different industries, professions, and communities. Jargon can be useful, often providing short cuts to complex ideas. However, the aim should be to stay within the realm of common usage, and most importantly, to be consistent across the organisation. Here are a few commonly used terms, simply explained.

* **Aims:** What is intended to be achieved, stated in the broadest terms.
* **Appropriateness:** Consistency between stakeholder needs and expectations and your objectives.
* **Effectiveness:** How well the program meets its objectives.
* **Efficiency:** How well resources are used, often assessed by a comparison of inputs and outputs, e.g. cost per client.
* **Evaluation:** Deciding on the worth or merit of your activity and the process for measuring this.
* **Goals/objectives:** Actual results the organisation is committed to achieving. What you are trying to accomplish
* **Mission Statement:** An organisation's values and purpose expressed in a written form, usually in the broadest terms.
* **Outcomes:** The effects of the activities, products or services delivered.
* **Performance indicator/measure:** Measures the degree to which you have achieved your objective.
* **Purpose:** The reason the organisation or project exists.
* **Qualitative data:** Information on quality, atmosphere, and style - often perceived as subjective, e.g. quality of life.
* **Quantitative data:** Information that can be expressed in numbers and quantities - often perceived as objective, eg. average income.
* **Reporting:** What is done with the data and how it will be analysed and presented
* **Strategic/Business Plan:** A statement of what is intended to be achieved, including specific goals and outcomes, how and when they will be achieved and details of the evaluation process. It is, however, only a map of the planning process and can soon become out of date; it must be revisited and updated at chosen intervals.
* **Strategy:** The method and tactics to be used in achieving the goals.