

Strategic Planning:

A Toolkit for Mission Success

Success through Implementation

Mission Spark

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Mission Spark

About Mission Spark and the Author

Mission Spark, LLC (www.missionspark.org) partners with philanthropy, nonprofit and social enterprise leaders to achieve transformative social change and to strengthen the social sector. They work to achieve this mission by providing results-driven consulting, training, and facilitation in Colorado.

Kara Penn, MBA, MPP is a Principal Consultant for Mission Spark. Kara has 18 years of experience as director, founder, board member, facilitator and consultant in Colorado and throughout the United States. Kara's approach is collaborative, inclusive and direct. She's consulted to more than 75 non-profits, NGOs, government entities and social enterprises on core management and leadership areas, including board development, program management, fund development, assessment and strategic planning. She holds her MBA from MIT Sloan School of Management, and her MPP from the University Of Chicago Harris School Of Public Policy. She is the co-author of *Fail Better, Design Smart Mistakes and Succeed Sooner*, a general management book published by Harvard Business Review Press.



Using this Toolkit

Using this Toolkit

This toolkit is divided into four parts:

1. Strategic Planning Fundamentals
2. Strategic Planning Process
3. Strategic Plan Content
4. Strategic Plan Implementation

Uses for this Toolkit:

- Understand how strategic planning might assist your program
- Assess your readiness to engage in strategic planning and achieve planning success
- Learn the basics of strategic planning, from language to content
- Review an outline of a strategic planning process, from which to develop your own approach
- Develop your own plan content, using tools to review and guide your organizational identity, strategic goals and work plans



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Introduction

A strategic plan is a tool that provides guidance in fulfilling a mission with maximum efficiency and impact. If it is to be effective and useful, it should articulate specific goals and describe the action steps and resources needed to accomplish them. A successful plan is, by definition, a usable plan—one that informs the organization’s activities as well as its long-range view, and one that yields meaningful improvements in effectiveness, capacity and relevance. As a rule, most strategic plans should be reviewed and revamped every three to five years.

While not a comprehensive guide to strategic planning, this toolkit provides robust grounding in the purpose and value of strategic planning for your organization, verses you in the process and content of planning, and offers practical tools to assess and guide you as an organization in pursuing a strategic planning process and written plan to guide your organization over the coming years.

Hallmarks of Organizations Successful in Strategic Planning

- Shared commitment to and engagement in planning among staff and Board.
- Seeks to understand the current state of the organization and the environment in which it operates.
- Engages stakeholders for their insights and feedback on the organization and opportunities.
- The organization is not in immediate financial crisis, but has opportunity to look forward in the direction of the organization.
- The organization ties their strategic plan to their budget each year—to financially enable their strategic goals.
- The organization actively ties their strategic plan to operations, and ties review and assessment of plan progress to regular board and staff management practices.

Purpose of a Strategic Plan

Strategic Planning is a process through which an organization agrees and builds commitment to a set of priorities and strategies essential to fulfilling its mission; these priorities then guide actions that will make progress on the mission over a defined period of time.

An organizational strategic plan:

- Guides and focuses your organization’s activities – serves as a road-map
- Guides your organization’s decision-making at all levels of an organization – helps the organization’s leaders make more deliberate decisions
- Guides your organization’s allocation of resources



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

- Identifies specific goals, activities and benchmarks for success
- Helps keep your organization's staff accountable and focused on established priorities, and is often used to inform staff performance measurements
- Helps monitor progress of activities
- Provides a framework to help an organization reach its agreed-upon goals
- Should be the focus of organizational activities. If a discussion or activity does not contribute to achieving the strategic plan, it may no longer be a good use of time and resources for the organization
- Can promote the transformation of an organization

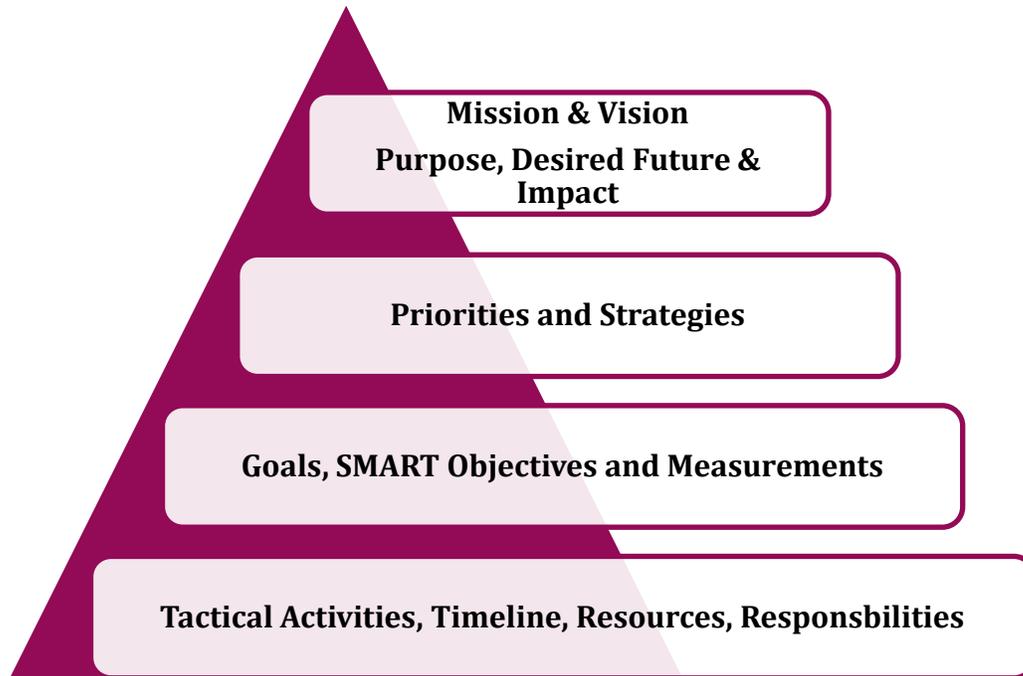
Ways to use a strategic plan:

- Can educate and inspire confidence in others (sponsors, funders, partners)
- Guide staff discussions and focus staff meetings
- Make budget decisions and help in allocating resources
- Tool to assist in hiring and recruitment decisions for staff
- Focus staff activities and decision-making
- Determine ongoing organizational priorities
- Help in making strategic and day-to-day decisions



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Elements of a Strategic Plan



Definitions

Values: Moral compass that drives organizational culture and decision-making. "What you stand for."

Vision: Guiding image of success formed in terms of a contribution to those you represent or serve.

Mission: A succinct statement of your initiative's reason for being that communicates who you are, what you hope to achieve for whom, and through what means.

Goal: Broad statements that describe the intended result or direction for specific organizational activities.

Objective: A measurable step toward achieving a goal. Objectives should be 'SMART.'

Action Steps/Activities: Specific activities that must take place to achieve objectives.



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

The Strategy Pyramid

Adapted from 'Nonprofit Strategy Revolution' by David La Piana, 2008

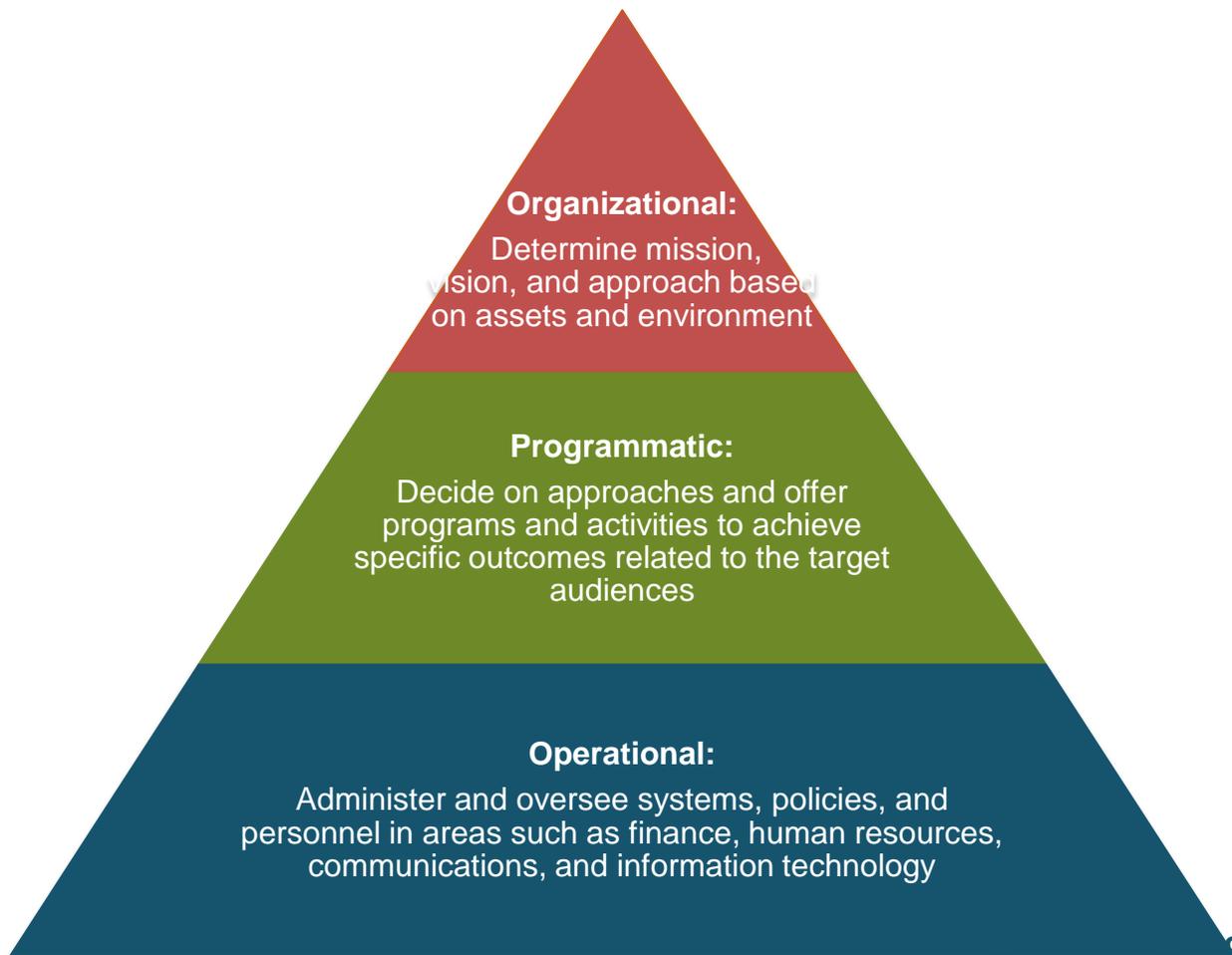
La Piana defines **strategy** as a coordinated set of actions designed to create and sustain a competitive advantage in achieving a nonprofit's mission.

Nonprofit's competitive advantage is an organization's ability to sustainably produce social value using a unique asset, outstanding execution, or both.

- Examples of nonprofit assets are location, program design, cultural capacity, partners, etc.
- Examples of nonprofit execution are public reputation, low costs, value through efficiency, speed in delivery, accountability, etc.

Types of strategy

There are three "levels" of a nonprofit organization, each of which requires different types of strategy: organizational strategy, programmatic strategy, and operational strategy. These levels are displayed in the Strategy Pyramid. During the strategic retreat our focus is primarily on organizational strategy.



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Determining Readiness

Worksheet: Assessing Readiness for Strategic Planning

Past Experience	
What contributed to past planning success?	What contributed to past planning failure?

Current Reality	
What is in place to support successful planning?	What is missing and needed for successful planning?

Here are some important needs for a successful strategic planning process. Check those that are currently in place when assessing readiness.

- Access to many of the types of data needed for the environmental scan (i.e. It may make be helpful to complete the community health assessment prior to strategic planning)
- Access to a skilled facilitator, either internal or external
- Adequate time for a quality environmental scan
- Adequate time to devote to stakeholder engagement in the process
- A champion for the strategic planning process from the governing body
- Budget allocations for the process
- Buy-in from Senior Leadership at the Organization
- Commitment to the process including remaining flexible



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

- Understanding of the process and expectations for how the plan will be used throughout the agency
- Other _____

[Sample from NACCHO—National Association of County & City Health Officials]

Designing a Planning Process

In a rapidly changing world, it is important to have clear goals for our organizations and to regularly review our progress. The steps in strategic planning provide a framework for the board to clarify organizational goals and evaluate different strategies for achieving those goals. It helps us to make sure that our budget, our services, and our personnel are focused on our mission and in conformance with our values. This help sheet lists the major steps in strategic planning, focusing on the role of the Board of Directors. Regardless of what planning model you use, the steps are similar.

1. Board of Directors and Staff Leadership decide to engage in strategic planning to enable organization:
 - a. to adapt to uncertain environment;
 - b. to respond to changing community needs;
 - c. to establish clear, measurable program outcomes;
 - d. to set priorities for board and staff activities;
 - e. to ensure services and organizational practices align with vision and values.
2. Leadership selects a group of 3-5 people to form a Strategic Planning Committee. The role of the committee is:
 - a. to set a realistic time-frame for the planning process;
 - b. to select the people to be involved;
 - c. to engage and advise a consultant or facilitator.
3. Strategic Planning Committee finds and recommends consultant.
 - a. Organization engages consultant.
4. Consultant and Strategic Planning Committee agree on strategic planning process.
 - a. Planning horizon (How far ahead can you plan?);
 - b. Completion date;
 - c. Who should be involved? What stakeholders should participate? What are the roles of the board and staff in the planning process?
 - d. What and how information will be collected (interviews, focus groups, questionnaires);
 - e. Dates for board planning sessions.
5. Consultant and/or Strategic Planning Committee and/or staff gather information.
 - a. interviews, focus groups, surveys, or other research.
6. Consultant facilitates planning session(s) with Board, Executive Director and invited stakeholders (optional). Participants



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

- a. review your organizational mission, vision and values;
 - b. identify key issues arising from your organization's strengths and weaknesses;
 - c. identify key issues arising from the environment in which you operate;
 - d. select broad strategies to manage these issues;
 - e. set goals and priorities for reasonable planning period (often 3-5 years).
 - f. assign responsibilities; set criteria for measuring progress.
7. Consultant (with Strategic Planning Committee) drafts plan and presents to Board
 8. Board of Directors reviews, revises, approves draft plan
 9. Staff develops annual operational/action plans. Board and staff implement strategic plan.
 10. Board and Staff leadership monitors progress, modifies programs and/or plan as required.

SAMPLE Strategic Planning Retreat AGENDA

Session Outcomes

- Shared strategies and priorities for XXX over the next 3 years, YYYY-YYYY
- Articulated goals and objectives around which to develop a detailed strategic plan
- Clarify next steps in strategic planning and identify roles and tasks

2:00 p.m.

Welcome & Introductions

"Where you want to see XXX in three years"
Review of Retreat Purpose & Agenda

2:30 p.m.

Context for Planning

High level review of XXX Situational Analysis Report
level of review assumes all participants have read report in advance
Q & A, discussion

3:45 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Mission/Vision/Values

Are existing statements in line with current and future direction?
Suggested changes to intent/meaning (but not word-smithing)

4:15 p.m-5:30 p.m.*

3-Year Strategy Discussions 'What Success Looks Like'

Small Group Work:

Full Group Review of Small Group Process and Questions

1. Describe XXX impact by 2018
2. Identify core services/programs and quality measures
3. What does organizational structure and operations look like to realize #1 & #2? Include budget ballpark.



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

4. How is this future plan for XXX financed? What are the specific strategies for adequate and consistent resources?

Small Group Tasks

Discuss each question informed by Situational Analysis
Capture agreements & prepare for presentation

**15 minute break as part of transition to assigned small groups*

5:30 p.m.

Select Dinner and Reconvene as Full Group

5:45 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Strategy Presentations

Facilitated discussion leading to shared strategy

- What does success look like?
- What are the core lines of service driving a sustainable strategy?

6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Strategic Goals

Develop shared goals to support identified strategy

Screen Goals

Develop Objectives for goals as 'task pairs' (extra time bonus)

7:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Strategic Plan Development: Next Steps

Review of plan format and components

Assignment of plan development tasks and responsible parties

Review of timeline

Closing/ Recap next steps

8:00 p.m.

Adjourn

Suggested Retreat Ground Rules:

- Practice mutual respect and active listening
- Allow room for equal participation
- Express your ideas and opinions with an emphasis on action/solutions
- Stay focused on the agenda topic—trust the process!
- Keep discussion grounded in reality but **focused on the future**
- Stay decision/agreement-oriented
- Commit to agreements and next steps
- Use the 'parking lot' for important but off-topic ideas



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

- Others?



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

'What Success Looks Like' Discussion Questions

1. Describe Your Organization's Impact by {YEAR}

This question asks you to think of what your organization will have achieved in home health and for its stakeholders; What are the outcomes for which you will have been responsible?

2. Identify those core services which will contribute to that impact

As you list existing or new services relevant to desired impact above, capture the service-line strategy and the quality and success measures essential to these service lines.

3. What do your organizational structure and operations look like to support the above?

Consider staff, board, partners, facilities, new infrastructure.

4. How is this future for your organization financed? What are the specific strategies for adequate and consistent resources?

Consider earned income, reallocation of existing resources, grants, partner contribution and involvement, business involvement, and/or relevant individual donor activities or campaigns or events.



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Clarifying Organizational Identity

Values

Values can be understood as operating philosophies or principles that guide an organization and its relationships with team members and the external world.

Writing a values statement begins with members of the collective sharing and prioritizing a list of values that should guide the organization, agreeing upon the most important values and then writing statements that express the value in context of the organization's operations.

Examples

The Colorado Coalition for Girls values...

- Girls having **equitable access** to a full range of life opportunities and the right to choose them.
- Addressing root causes and encouraging **systemic change** to establish equity for girls.
- **Girls having a voice** in policies and laws which affect them.
- Girls having access to spiritual, physical, emotional and sexual health **specific to their needs**.

VNA Colorado Statement of Organizational Values/Code of Ethics:

We believe delivering care with integrity and high ethical standards is our priority.

- We deliver care with compassion, expertise and professionalism, respecting the dignity of every individual.
- We inform patients of their rights and responsibilities.
- We protect the privacy and maintain confidentiality of information of patients, employees and volunteers.
- We believe accessible and affordable home health, hospice and public health services are essential to the well-being of the communities we serve.
- We provide home health, hospice and wellness services as an integral part of the health care continuum in collaboration with our partners.
- We work to ensure that all people have reasonable access to care, regardless of their ability to pay, to the extent of the agency's resources.
- We admit a patient for service only if we can provide safe, professional care at the level of intensity needed.



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Mission

A succinct statement of your initiative's reason for being that communicates who you are, what you hope to achieve for whom, and through what means. Answers "what good for whom."

Characteristics

- Serves as a guide for organizational goals and objectives
- Indicates your values and makes your identity known
- Creates a visceral connection between organization and stakeholders
- Is for public consumption and should be clear and concise

Examples

The Sierra Club inspires people to join in protecting the earth's natural treasures and vitality. Through the club, individuals magnify their power to restore the places where they live and preserve the places they love.

All Families Deserve a Chance (AFDC) Coalition is a statewide advocacy organization that promotes public policy to improve the lives of all Coloradans living in poverty.

Visiting Nurse Association is committed to a continuum of health care in the home and community supporting optimal well-being, independence, and dignity.

Does the Statement...

- Clearly state the purpose of the organization?
- Include an intended audience/geography?
- Convey the values driving the purpose?
- Suggest the mechanism(s) for accomplishing its purpose?
- Employ specific language, active verbs, and is concise and jargon-free?



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Vision

- They excite and inspire, and are presented with credible commitment. People want to be inspired, and to feel good about where they are heading.
- Second, they are within grasp—can be perceived as attainable—while challenging people to work hard. People rise to challenges when they perceive they can succeed at them.
- Third, the vision can be expressed succinctly. People respond to memorable ideas.



Examples

Children's Garden envisions generations of responsive, aware individuals prepared and empowered to nurture and shape our world.

The Vision of the *Colorado Council on the Arts* is that the arts are part of everyday lives of Coloradoans.

The Community Resource Center envisions a thriving Colorado nonprofit sector in which all organizations have access to the best resources and assistance and can apply them to create healthy, vibrant communities.

Be a Colorado leader in advanced health care delivery and outcomes in partnership with patients and their families, our staff, and community resources.

Does the Statement...

- Express the ultimate results of the initiative?
- Express these results in terms of changes or conditions?
- Is it brief and memorable?
- Inspire you?
- Strikes a balance between being lofty and realistic?
- Employ specific language and avoid generalities like "best," "unique," "quality," etc



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Strategic Planning Terms

Guide the Plan:

- **CORE VALUES:** Priority statements of beliefs are the basic building blocks of an organization and that shape criteria for determining organizational decision making
- **MISSION:** The organization's purpose – why it exists
- **VISION:** A picture of the organization's desired future in terms of lives or communities changed

Details of the Plan:

- **GOALS:** A set of aims that focus energies and guide the organization's direction that:
 - Help move the organization from its current state to the desired future state
 - Define what is to be achieved
 - Will take length of plan to achieve and are a manageable number (approx. 5)
 - Are realistic and help prioritize the organization's activities and focus
- **OBJECTIVES:** Your objectives should be kept simple and SMART:
 - Specific
 - Measurable
 - Achievable
 - Relevant
 - Time-bound
- **TACTICS & ACTIVITIES:** Detailed activities and specific action steps directed toward meeting an organization's objectives
- **BUDGET & RESOURCES:** The commitment of resources necessary to implement plans—the financial expression and allocation of other resources (time, etc.) for a particular plan of work



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

- Considers both output and outcome measures and indicators
- **TIMELINES & RESPONSIBILITIES**
- **EVALUATION & MONITORING:** Evaluation is an integral part of the ongoing planning process used to:
 - Determine the degree to which you achieved your goals
 - Identify and analyze what did not work well
 - Analyze unanticipated results
 - Substantiate the need for programming
 - Identify the need for course corrections or organizational shifts

Sample Vision to Evaluation

Colorado Council on the Arts

The **Vision** of the Colorado Council on the Arts is that the arts are part of everyday lives of Coloradoans.

Mission

The mission of the Colorado Council on the Arts is to promote the cultural, educational, and economic growth of Colorado through development of its arts and cultural heritage.

Goals

- Make the arts more accessible to all Coloradoans
- Expand access to quality arts education for young people
- Preserve and promote our cultural heritage
- Strengthen the financial stability of the arts industry
- Encourage artistic excellence and support freedom of expression

Goal: Expand access to quality arts education for young people

Objective: Promote and support arts learning for youth, including formal training in the arts as well as arts infused into other disciplines or fields



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Action: Provide grants for in-school and after-school model projects

Action: Research and disseminate best practices in arts education

Action: Promote alliances between arts learning and K-1educators

Expected Outcomes: A statewide network exists with strong arts learning programs that actively address Colorado-specific arts education issues.

Output Measurements: number of participating educators and cultural organizations and artists; number of convenings; new policies proposed.



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Outlining Goals and Objectives

Strategic Goal

A broad statement that describes the intended result or direction for specific organizational activities. Words like *Increase, Establish, Create, Build, and Improve* typically precede the result desired. Because organizational vision statements are “outward facing” and focused on community impact, goals typically are about impact, although there may be 1-2 inwardly facing goal about capacity to make an impact as well. The result should encompass the length of the plan.

Example: *Increase community awareness and understanding of the mission and value of XX organization.*

Objective Supporting a Strategic Goal

A measurable step toward achieving a goal (2-3 per goal), and since these are also statements of measurable change, they often begin with words like *expand, capture, create, establish, develop, etc.* Objectives should be 'SMART.' (*Specific, Measurable (consider outcomes and outputs), Achievable, Relevant and Time bound*).

Example: *Establish three to five additional community partnerships to increase awareness of XX services.*

Action Steps/Activities supporting an Objective

Specific activities that must take place to achieve objectives.

Example: Identify and screen potential community partnerships for XX.

Together, activities will help in achieving an objective and objectives will help in achieving a goal.



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Worksheet: Creating Strategic Goals

Proposed Goal	
Example Objectives	

Reality Check		
Yes	No	
		Does this goal contribute directly or indirectly to achieving the vision and strategy of the organization? How?
		Does the goal state what you are trying to achieve?
		Does the goal help the organization leverage its strengths and minimize its weaknesses?
		Could this goal be achieved in three years?
		Can this goal have objectives that are measurable?
		Are there any specific barriers that would need to be addressed to achieve this goal? If so, what are they?



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Goal:		
Objective:		
Measurements:		
Actions:	By When (Qtr/Yr)	Responsible



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Contents of Strategic Plan

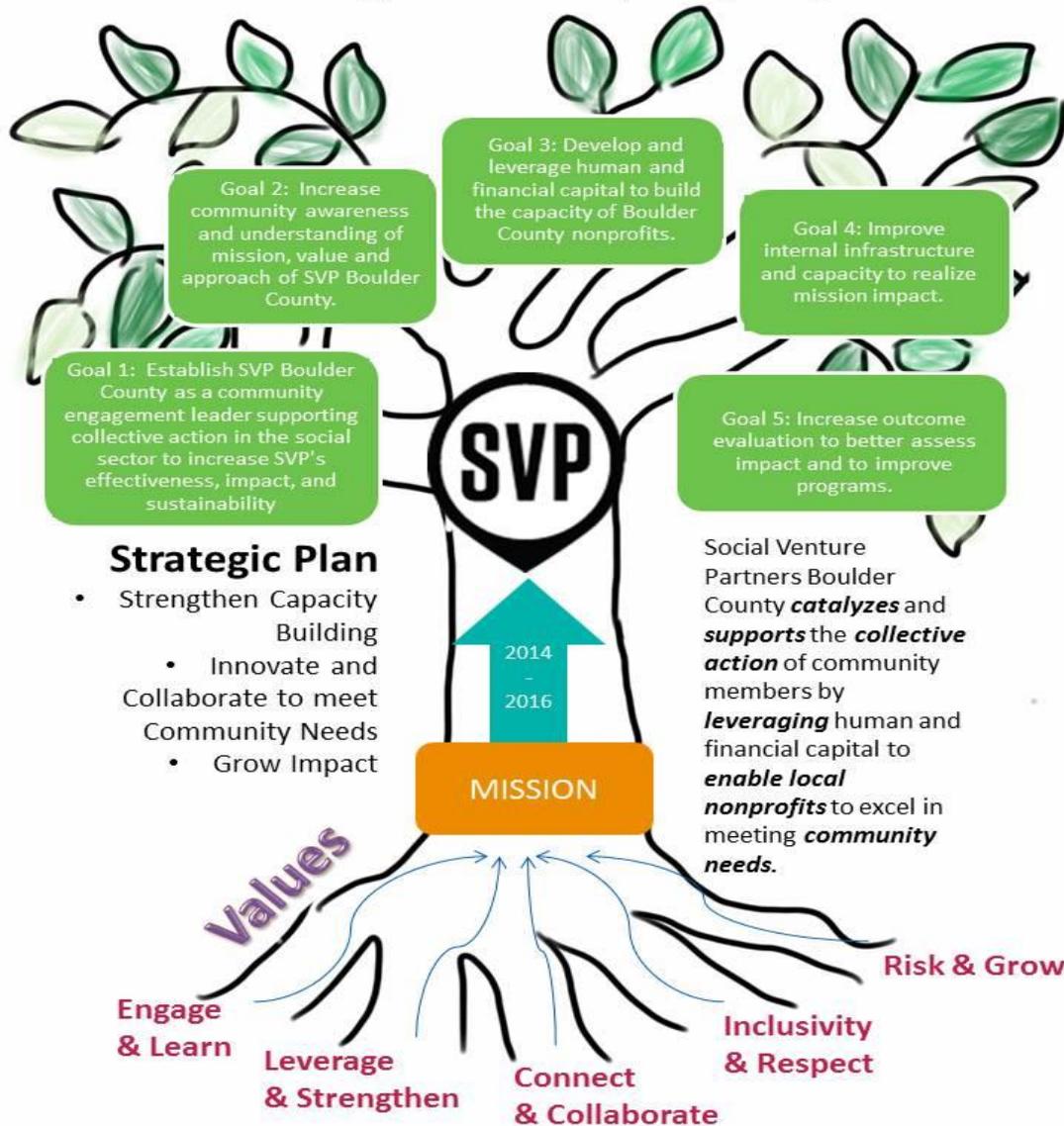
- Introduction
- Executive Summary
- Strategic Principles (Values, Mission and Vision)
- Critical Issues and Priority Strategy
 - Includes overarching strategic orientation
 - Includes visual representation of plan
 - Includes summary of strategic goals
- Plan, including goals, objectives, action steps (tactics), costs and resources, measurable outputs and outcomes, timeline, responsible party
 - Includes narrative
 - Includes spreadsheet work plan
- Implementation and Monitoring Practices and Tools
 - Includes strategy screen
 - Includes plan dashboard
- Appendices



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Sample Strategic Plan Summary: Social Venture Partners (SVP)

Vision: All people in Boulder County working together to solve community problems creatively and effectively.



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Sample Quarterly Work Plan

This work plan is the outline of activities and responsibilities that coordinate with the successful implementation of the 2015-2017 strategic plan. The calendar can be modified as deadlines and special events change. It can be reviewed and updated monthly/quarterly.

Q1 2015: Goal, Objective, and Action	Start Date	Oversight	Progress to Date	Date Completed	Notes
Ex Goal #1: Increase Referral Partners					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No objectives/actions in first quarter 					
Ex Goal #2: Increase Community Awareness					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approve new mission, vision, values 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop market research 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ID and define market targets 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure resources for implementation 					
Goal #3: Description					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective/action 					
Goal #4: Description					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective/action 					
Goal #5: Description					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective/action 					



Strategic Plan Fundamentals



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Next Steps and Task Teams:

Tasks

- Revise mission/vision/values as appropriate
- Develop objectives, activities, responsible party, timeline, budget needs and measures for each goal
- Develop plan implementation monitoring tool/approach

Teams:

- Interdisciplinary as appropriate (board members, managers, others?)
- Approximately one month to complete assigned tasks
- Each team will have a Mission Spark point person to assist

Team Name:

Task(s):

Members:

Team Lead:

Mission Spark Point Persons:

Other Next steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



Strategic Plan Fundamentals

Planning Timeline: Sample Template

Activity	Timeframe	Review by	Delivery
Organizational Assessment and Best Practice / Trends Research	02/21-05/16	N/A	N/A
Stakeholder Engagement	04/01-05/16	N/A	N/A
Situational Analysis Report	To Committee 05/23	05/29	To Board & select staff 06/01
Vision & Goal Retreat Packet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board and executive staff 	To Committee 05/23	05/29	To Board & select staff 06/01
Strategic Planning Retreat	06/06	N/A	Board and Select staff
Task-Team Plan Drafting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manager/staff/ board teams 	06/09-07/11	draft,07/02 Meet or Conference Call	Final by 7/11
Final Plan (Mission Spark) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrative and work plan 	Early August	7/28 To Committee	08/04 To Board
Board Meeting (managers included?) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Plan Review Monitoring & Communication 	August Board Meeting	Agenda by 08/18	08/25 meet



Links & Resources

Links and Resources

Books, Articles, and Reports

[Fundraising in Tough Times: A No-Nonsense Guide to Surviving in a Challenging Economy](#)

[Successful Fundraising in Tough Times](#)

[20 Emergency Funding Sources for Nonprofits](#)

[Fundraising When Money is Tight \(book\)](#)

[Fundraising When Money is Tight \(article\)](#)

[Ten Nonprofit Funding Models](#)

[Fundraising in Times of Crisis](#)

Websites

[The Chronicle of Philanthropy](#)

[The Non-Profit Times](#)

[Certified Fundraising Executives](#)

