

This example can be used as a starting point to create a policy or other document for your own land trust, but should be altered as necessary to reflect your organization's unique circumstances using guidance found in the *Land Trust Standards and Practices Guidebook* text and corresponding Standards and Practices Curriculum.

Please Note: If you are using this material for accreditation purposes, see also [the Land Trust Accreditation Commission website](#) for additional information. To search for policies from accredited land trusts, insert <<accredited>> along with the search term (e.g., conflict interest policy accredited).

Free Management Library's
On-Line Nonprofit Organization Development Program Module #6:

Developing Your Strategic Plan

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To order: [Nuts-and-Bolts Guide to Develop and Operate Nonprofit Boards](#)

To order: [Nuts-and-Bolts Guide to Leadership and Supervision](#)

To order: [Nuts-and-Bolts Guide to Nonprofit Program Design, Marketing and Evaluation](#)

(This module is in the [nonprofit organization development program](#). However, this module can also be used by anyone as a self-study exercise to learn more about strategic planning and writing a strategic plan.)

INTRODUCTION

Simply put, strategic planning identifies where the organization is going over the next (typically) one to three years and how it's going to get there. The "strategic" part of this planning process is the continual attention to current changes in the organization and its environment, and how this effects the future of the organization. Skills in strategic planning are critical to the long-term success of your nonprofit. This form of planning includes:

- a) Taking a wide look around at what's going on outside the organization and how it might effect the organization (an environmental scan)
- b) Taking a hard look at what's going on inside the organization, including its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (a SWOT analysis)
- c) Establishing statements of mission, vision and values
- d) Establishing goals to accomplish over the next (usually) three years or so, as a result of what's going on inside and outside the organization
- e) Identifying how those goals will be reached (strategies, objectives, responsibilities and timelines)

Strategic planning determines the overall direction and goals of the organization. Consequently, strategic planning influences numerous aspects of the organization, including what:

- a) Programs and services will be provided by the nonprofit and how those programs and services will be designed
- b) Organizational design and roles are needed by the organization
- c) Performance goals are established for positions throughout the nonprofit

- d) Board committees should be developed
- e) Resources are needed to reach those goals, and consequently, how much money is needed to procure those resources -- ultimately, the goals determine the content of various budgets
- f) Amounts are needed for inclusion in fundraising plans

Two key points to remember while proceeding through this module:

- 1) The planning process is at least as important as the planning document itself.
- 2) The planning process is never "done" -- the planning process is a continuous cycles that's part of the management process itself.

NOTE ABOUT BOARD COMMITTEES: Consider establishing a Board Planning Committee to review and help guide implementation the information in this learning module. The Planning Committee might be comprised of chairs from other board committees. Major activities and goals from this learning module could be incorporated in that Committee's [Committee Work Plan](#). This module includes additional recommendations for membership of the group of planners.

NOTE ABOUT HOW TO DEEPEN AND ENRICH LEARNING IN THIS MODULE: Adults learn best when they actually a) apply new information and materials, and b) exchange ongoing feedback with others about their experiences. You can substantially deepen and enrich your learning from this module by forming your own local learning community! Members of the community support each other to apply new learning, exchange ongoing feedback and share results from their experiences. Form an [Leaders Circles](#), for about \$20 a member!

MATERIALS TO REVIEW

- *The following materials will help you address each of the topics and learning activities in this module.*
- *NOTE: Each of the following links is to a one- to two-page overview. Read all of the following documents referenced by the following links.*

Introduction to Basics of Planning (general to most planning processes)

Read all of the following document referenced by the following link.

[General Planning Process \(basic elements of planning process\)](#)

Introduction to Strategic Planning

Read all of the following documents referenced by the following links.

[Benefits of Strategic Planning](#)

[Basic Description of Strategic Planning](#)

[When Should Strategic Planning Be Done?](#)

[Basic Overview of Various Strategic Planning Models](#)

[Support Center for Nonprofit Management \(includes answers to numerous questions\)](#)

Preparation for Strategic Planning

Read all of the following documents referenced by the following links.

[Need Consultant or Facilitator to Help You With Planning?](#)

[Who Should Be Involved in Planning?](#)

[How Many Planning Meetings Will We Need?](#)

[How Do We Ensure Implementation of Our New Plan?](#)

Conducting Strategic Planning

Read all of the following documents referenced by the following links.

[Basics of Developing Mission, Vision and Values Statements](#)

[Basics of Identifying Strategic Issues and Goals](#)

[Basics of Action Planning \(as part of strategic planning\)](#)

[Writing and Communicating the Plan](#)

[Basics of Monitoring, Evaluating and Deviating from Plan](#)

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- *Learners are strongly encouraged to discuss the following questions with peers, board members, management and staff, as appropriate.*
- *There are a variety of views and approaches regarding strategic planning. There is no one "perfect" approach for all situations. Therefore, the reader is exposed to a variety of perspectives in the materials that are referenced from the items below.*

Introduction to Strategic Planning

1. What is the overall purpose of strategic planning? (See [Benefits of Strategic Planning](#), [What is Strategic Planning](#) and [Getting a Feel for Strategic Planning](#).)

2. What's the difference between strategic planning and long-range planning? (See [What are The Key Concepts and Definitions in Strategic Planning?](#) (click on "Strategic Planning"))

Preparation for Strategic Planning

1. What are some preparations to make before conducting strategic planning? (See [What Do I Need to Know Before I Start the Planning Process?](#) (click on "Strategic Planning") and [How Do I Use Retreats in the Planning Process?](#) (click on "Strategic Planning"))

2. What are some basic considerations when deciding if you need to use an outside facilitator or not? (See [Should I Use an External Consultant?](#) (click on "Strategic Planning") and [Need Consultant or Facilitator to Help You With Planning?](#))

3. A major complaint about strategic planning is that the plan document ends up collecting dust on a shelf. What are some considerations to ensure that plan is actually implemented? (See [How Do We Increase the Chance of Our Plan Being Implemented?](#))

[\(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#) and [How Do We Ensure Implementation of Our New Plan?](#)

4. Who should be involved in strategic planning? (See [What Are the Individual Roles in Strategic Planning? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#) and [Who Should Be Involved in Planning?](#))

Conducting Strategic Planning

1. What are the basic steps in the strategic planning process? (See [What Are the Basic Steps in the Strategic Planning Process? \(click on "Strategic Planning", Basic Description of Strategic Planning](#) and [Basic Overview of Various Strategic Planning Models.](#))

2. What is a vision statement? (See [What is a Vision Statement? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#) and [Basics in Developing a Vision Statement.](#))

3. What is a mission statement? (See [What is a Mission Statement? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#) and [Basics in Developing a Mission Statement.](#))

4. What is a values statement? (See [Basics in Developing a Values Statement.](#))

5. What is a situational assessment? (See [What is a Situational Assessment? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#), [Environmental Scan \(taking a wide look around\)](#) and [Looking at Organization's Strength's, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats \(SWOT\).](#))

6. What is a strategy? (See [What is a Strategy? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#) and [Basics of Identifying Strategic Issues and Goals.](#))

7. What is action planning? (See [Basics of Action Planning.](#))

8. What is an annual operating plan? (See [How Do You Develop an Annual Operating Plan? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#))

9. What should a strategic plan document include? (See [What Should a Strategic Plan Include? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#) and [Basics of Writing and Communicating the Plan.](#))

10. What's involved in writing and communicating the strategic plan? (See [Writing and Communicating the Plan.](#))

11. How is a strategic plan evaluated? What if we end up changing our plan? (See [Basics of Monitoring, Evaluating and Deviating from Plan.](#))

Organizational Systems and Practices Driven by Strategic Goals

1. In the Introduction section of this learning module, you read about numerous aspects (5) of the organization that were directly influenced by the results of strategic planning.

Name as many of these items as you can and then compare your answers to those listed in the Introduction section of this module.

ACTIVITIES TO BUILD SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES

- *Learners are strongly encouraged to complete the following activities, and share and discuss results with peers, board members, management and staff, as appropriate.*
- *You can write a draft of your own strategic plan by filling in the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#) as you proceed through the activities listed below.*
- *Learners are strongly encouraged to use a team of planners to complete the strategic plan. The following information references advice and guidelines for forming this team.*
- *As you proceed through the following activities, be sure to note any incomplete actions in the [Action Item Planning List](#).*

Questions for Nonprofits That Have Already Done Strategic Planning

1. Identify any issues in your current approach to strategic planning and address the issues before you begin your next round of strategic planning. Consider the following questions. Is your strategic plan being implemented? If not, why not? Was your board sufficiently involved in strategic planning? If not, why not? Write a one-page description of the issues you see with your planning process, how it can be improved and who must do what to improve it. Discuss this description in an upcoming board meeting for feedback and to write an action plan to address the issues. (The following links may help you in your considerations. See [How Do We Increase the Chance of Our Plan Being Implemented? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#) and [How Do We Ensure Implementation of Our New Plan?](#))

Preparation (for Nonprofits That Have Not Yet Done Strategic Planning)

1. Address any hesitations that planners might have before you start planning. Do you have any reservations or hesitations about the value of strategic planning? If you do not want to pursue the strategic planning process as it is described in this module, then how will you (the board, chief executive and other staff) decide what your nonprofit will be doing over the next few years and how it will do it? (Many funders, prospective board members and chief executives will want to see some form of a strategic plan document. Consider this in your decision about how your nonprofit will do strategic planning.) (The following links may help you in your considerations and preparation. See [Benefits of Strategic Planning](#) and [What Do I Need to Know Before I Start the Planning Process? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#)).

2. Who should be involved in the planning? Consider who is responsible for the direction of your nonprofit, who will be responsible for carrying out all or portions of your plan and people who will be effected by implementation of your plan. Then decide who will be involved in your planning. (The following links may help you in your considerations.

See [What Are the Individual Roles in Strategic Planning? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#) and [Who Should Be Involved in Planning?](#))

3. How many meetings might you plan for your strategic planning process? (The following links may help you in your considerations. See [How Many Planning Meetings Will We Need?](#) and [How Do I Use Retreats the Planning Process? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#))

4. Might you need a consultant to help you through the process for the first time? (The following link may help you in your considerations. See [Should I Use an External Consultant? \(click on "Strategic Planning"\)](#) and [Using Consultants.](#))

Developing Your Basic Strategic Plan

1. Write Your Mission Statement

In the section labeled "Mission Statement" in the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write a concise description of the purpose of your nonprofit. Answer the question: "Why does our organization exist?" When answering this question, include the nature of your services, groups of clients that you serve and how you serve them. The mission statement should provide continued direction and focus to your plans, programs and services from your organization. (For additional assistance, see [Writing Mission Statements.](#))

2. Write Your Vision Statement

In the section labeled "Vision Statement" in the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write your vision statement. Answer the question "What do you hope for your clients?" Ideally, it should be written in a compelling, inspirational fashion. (For additional assistance, see [Writing Vision Statements.](#))

3. Write Your Values Statement

In the section labeled "Values Statement" in the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write down the important values from which you want your nonprofit to operate. The values statement depicts the priorities in how the organization carries out activities with stakeholders. (For additional assistance, see [Writing Values Statements.](#))

4. Conduct an External Analysis

In Appendix C of the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write down your thoughts from an external analysis. An external analysis looks at societal, technological, political, and economic trends effecting the organization, e.g., trends in donations, recent or pending legislation, federal funds, demographic trends, rate of access to trained labor, and competition. In your external analysis, don't forget to look at stakeholders' impressions of the organization, including funders', clients', community leaders', volunteers', etc. (For additional assistance, see [Environmental Scan \(taking a wide look around\).](#))

5. Conduct an Internal Analysis (SWOT)

In Appendix C of the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write down your thoughts from your internal analysis. Write down the major strengths and weaknesses of your organization. Write down the major threats and opportunities regarding your organization. Consider trends effecting the organization, e.g., true need for programs as evidenced by client participation and feedback, reputation of the organization, expertise of staff, facilities, strength of finances, solid administrative offices and operations, etc. (For additional assistance, see [Looking at Organization's Strength's, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats \(SWOT\)](#).)

6. Identify Strategic Issues

In Appendix C of the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write down the major immediate and near-term issues that your organization must address. New nonprofits, in particular, are often better off to first look at the major obstacles or issues that it faces, and next identify the more forward-looking, developmental goals to accomplish over the next few years. For example, current issues might be that the chief executive is not being paid, the board is not achieving a quorum, there is no money at all, etc. Developmental goals for a new nonprofit might be, for example, build a board, do a strategic plan, do a market analysis to build a program, get volunteers, hire staff, etc. (The following links may be useful at this point when identifying issues: [Unique Nature and Struggles of Traditional Small Nonprofits](#) and [Life Cycles of Organizations](#).)

To identify the key issues identified from your strategic analyses, consider the following guidelines:

- a) From considering the effects of weaknesses and threats that you identified, what are the major issues that you see? List as many as you can. Consider issues over the term of your strategic plan, but look very closely at the next year especially. Many organizations have stumbled badly because they ended up "falling over their feet" while being focused much too far down the road.
- b) Consider each of issues. Ask whether it's "important" or "urgent." Often, issues seem very important when they're only urgent, for example, changing a flat tire is an urgent issue -- but you'd never put "changing a tire" in your strategic plan. Attend only to the important issues and not the urgent issues.
- c) Deal with issues that you can do something about. Issues that are too narrow do not warrant planning and issues that are too broad will bog you down.
- d) Issues should be clearly articulated so that someone from outside of the organization can read the description and understand the nature of the issue.

7. Establish Strategic Goals

In the section labeled "Goals and Strategies" in the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write down the strategic goals to address the above-identified issues and the more forward-looking, developmental goals. Consider goals over the term of your strategic plan, but look very closely at the next year especially. Design and word your goals to be "SMARTER", that is, specific, measurable, acceptable to the people working to achieve the goals, realistic, timely, extending the capabilities of those working

to achieve the goals and rewarding to them. Don't worry so much about having to specify goals to be *exactly* "correct". Carefully consider whether the goals and strategies are closely aligned with your mission, vision and values.

As noted above, if you are developing a new nonprofit, then you'll probably have goals to build a board, do a strategic plan, do a market analysis to build a program, get volunteers, hire staff, etc. You'll probably have organization-wide goals (for example, goals in regard to building and running your nonprofit, for example, board development, staffing, getting a new building, etc) and service goals (goals that are directly in regard to providing products or services to your clients, for example, providing transportation service to clients, training services to clients, etc). Note that each of these service goals may eventually become a program in your nonprofit. More on this later in the [Module 7: Designing and Marketing Your Programs](#). (For additional assistance, see [Strategizing](#).)

8. Establish Strategies to Reach Goals

In the section labeled "Goals and Strategies" in the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write down the general approaches needed to reach the goals -- over the next year especially. Consider strategies over the term of the strategic plan, but especially over the next year. Carefully consider whether the goals and strategies are closely aligned with your mission, vision and values. Note that these strategies may become overall action plans for developing programs. More on this later in the [Module 7: Designing and Marketing Your Programs](#). (For additional assistance, see [Strategizing](#).)

9. Develop Staffing Plan

In Appendix E of the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write a rough draft of a staffing plan. To do this, reference each of the strategies to reach the goals and consider what kind of capabilities are needed to implement the strategies. This might seem like a lot of guesswork, particularly if you don't have experience in supervision. However, don't worry so much about being *exactly* correct -- you will likely refine your staffing plan later on as you design and plan your programs in the nonprofit development process. If you are developing a new nonprofit, you might think about including the following typical roles in your initial staffing plan (but again, consider these roles in terms of implementing the strategies in your plan): chief executive, administrative assistant and program directors for each of your major service goals. (The following links may help you when developing your staffing plan. See [Traditional Design of a Small, Incorporated Nonprofit Business Organization](#) and [Organizing Staff](#).)

10. Conduct Action Planning (objectives, responsibilities and timelines)

In Appendix A of the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), for each strategy, write down the objectives that must be achieved while implementing the strategy, when the objective should be completed and by whom -- especially over the next year. As you identify who will accomplish each of the objectives, you might end up refining your staffing plan. (For additional assistance, see [Action Planning](#).)

11. Develop an Operating Budget for Each Year in the Plan

In the table labeled "Your Budget Planning" in Appendix F of the [Framework for a Basic](#)

[Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), list the resources you will need to achieve the goals in the strategic plan and what it will cost to obtain and use the resources. You don't have to be *exactly* accurate -- besides, you may end up changing your budget as you give more attention to program design and planning in the next learning module. You should do a budget for each of the years included in the span of time covered by your strategic plan -- but give particular attention to the first year of the time span.

Look at each of your service, or program, goals. Think about how much revenue the program might make from fees, grants, donation, etc. Next, think about the expenses to run the program, such as human resources, facilities, equipment, special materials for programs, marketing and promotions, etc. (Note that this budget planning often provides strong input to the program budget. We'll likely convert your operating budget to a set of program budgets. More on this later in the [Module 7: Designing and Marketing Your Programs](#).) (For additional information, see [How Do I Prepare a Budget? \(click on "Financial Management"\)](#))

12. Associate Strategic Goals to Performance Goals for Board and Chief Executive

In Appendix D of the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write down which board committees will be addressing which strategic goals. The chief executive should be attending to responsibilities and goals that are directly aligned with the strategic goals of the organization (as should the responsibilities and goals of everyone else in the organization). Therefore, after strategic goals have been identified, it's timely for the board to update the performance goals of the chief executive (who, in turn, updates the performance goals of everyone else in the management and staff of the nonprofit organization). (For additional information, see [Performance Management](#), [Board of Director's Evaluation of Chief Executive](#) and [Employee Performance Management](#).)

13. Specify How Implementation of Plan Will Be Monitored and Evaluated

In Appendix H of the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write down how the status of implementation will be monitored and evaluated. Consider, for example, weekly written status reports to the chief executive from employees, and monthly written reports to board members. Status will address whether goals and objectives are being met or not, current issues and any resource needed to implement the plan. (For additional assistance, see [Monitoring, Evaluating and Deviating from Plan](#).)

14. Specify How Plan Will Be Communicated

In Appendix I of the [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#), write down how the plan will be communicated. Consider distributing all (or highlights from) the plan to everyone in the organization. Post your mission on the walls of your main offices. Consider giving each employee a card with the mission statement on it. Publish portions of your plan in your regular newsletter. (For additional assistance, see [Writing and Communicating the Plan](#).)

15. Complete Rest of Strategic Plan Document

To complete your strategic plan document, update the following sections of the

[Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document:](#)

- a) Complete the section labeled "Executive Summary" (guidelines are provided in the framework)
- b) Gain authorization from your board (they should sign in the section labeled "Board Authorization of Strategic Plan")
- c) In the body of the plan in the section titled "Organizational Information", include descriptions, for example, of the history of the organization, its major programs and services, highlights and accomplishments during the history of the organization, etc.
- d) In Appendix B, provide description of the process you used to develop the strategic plan, including what worked and what didn't. This information will be useful to planners when they next do strategic planning.

16. Acknowledge What You've Done -- Congratulations!

ASSESSMENT(S)

1. Answer the questions in subsection "Planning for the Entire Organization" in the section planning Indicators" in the [Checklist of Nonprofit Indicators](#). List an action plan to complete items suggested by the audit, but not done by your organization.

REMINDERS FOR THOSE IN THE ON-LINE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Reminders About You

1. Are you using your skills learned in previous modules? For example, as you using methodical approaches to problem solving and decision making? Are you using strong practices of meeting management? Are you communicating key information to others throughout your organization?
2. Are you discussing topics and materials with peers, board members and others, as appropriate? Discussion and ongoing feedback are some of the best methods to really learn new information and materials.
3. Are you helping others to hold you accountable to your times that you committed to reading and study in this program?

Reminders About Your Nonprofit

1. The results of your strategic plan should produce updates to a variety of aspects in your organization. Consider:
 - a) Are your programs and services directly aligned with your new strategic planning goals and strategies
 - b) Should any job descriptions and performance goals be updated for personnel in your nonprofit?
 - c) Should your board committees be re-organized to be more aligned to contribute toward achieving your new strategic goals?

2. How are you ensuring that your whole board understands and contributes to achieving your strategic goals?

TRACKING OPEN ACTION ITEMS

1. One of the first indicators that an organization is struggling is that open action items are not tracked and reviewed. (Open action items are required actions that have not yet been completed.) Instead, organization members only see and react to the latest "fires in the workplace". Whether open action items are critical to address now or not, they should not entirely be forgotten. Therefore, update and regularly review a list of open action items that includes listing each open action item, who is responsible to complete it, when it should be completed and any associated comments. When updating the list, consider action items as identified during discussions, learning activities and assessments in this module. Share and regularly review this action item list with the appropriate board, management and staff members in your nonprofit. You can use the following [Action Item Planning List](#).

2. What remaining questions or comments do you have that you want to pose? Pose them in the newsgroup soc.org.nonprofit.

3. How could this module be improved? If you have suggestions, then please see [contact information](#) (and thank you for your suggestions!).

(Learners in the nonprofit organization development program can return to the [nonprofit organization development program](#).)

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