

Strategic Planning Toolkit

A strategic plan serves as a roadmap for an organization. “Without a plan the board and staff may wander aimlessly from project to project, simply putting out fires.”

The election term or year advances quickly. A plan keeps efforts on track to advance the mission and serve the members.

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Strategic Planning Toolkit developed by Bob Harris, CAE. For samples and tips on association governance and management, visit www.nonprofitcenter.com or contact bob@rchcae.com



Purpose of a Strategic Plan

A strategic plan serves as a *roadmap* – especially important in organizations where volunteers frequently transition. A plan guides the board of directors, committees and staff.

It informs members what they can expect from the organization. Interested organizations and persons gain insights from the plan. It identifies priorities and the allocation of resources.

An organization without a plan is swayed each year by the interests of the current leadership. The plan should frame nearly every discussion, maintaining a keen focus on mission and members.

Precautions

Plans fail for many reasons. Though the board and staff may be enthusiastic about the planning *process*, it is common to see the plan collect dust after the retreat.

Reasons for failure include:

- Too many goals; beyond the capacity of the organization.
- Too tactical; simply a “to-do list.”
- Short term (1 year) rather than visionary thinking (3 to 5 years).
- Poorly timed; the plan is not finished at the retreat.
- The wrong - or too many - people at the retreat.
- Lack of performance measures.
- Leaders or staff ignoring the plan.



Hierarchy of Documents

The strategic plan is nearly as important as the governing documents. In the hierarchy of documents, a strategic plan ranks fifth. The absence of a plan can be a detrimental achieving the mission.

Guiding Documents



Planning Phases (Before, During and After)

Strategic planning can be described in three stages: before, during and after.



Planning the Retreat

Preparing for the retreat can be as important as the resulting plan. Getting the right people, right location and right facilitator are among the critical factors.

“Plans are worthless but planning is everything.”

Dwight Eisenhower

Determine the Need for a Plan

When was the last time the organization created or updated the strategic plan? Reach agreement amongst board and staff that a plan is essential to good governance and management. Discuss expectations at the retreat, including aspects such as cost, attendees, location and desired outcomes.

Select a Date and Timeframe

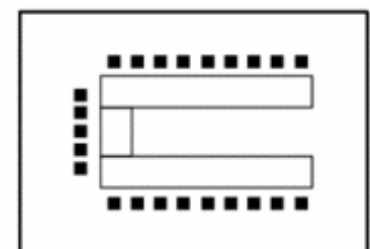
Allow at least 60 days to prepare for the retreat. The *importance* of planning would discourage one from trying to “squeeze it in” with another event.

The retreat deserves to be its own event at which minimal distractions occur. One of the worst settings would be to schedule it in the middle of a conference or at the end of a trade show. A serene environment is the preference.

Most boards need seven to eight hours to draft a plan. The time can be divided into two half-days or one long-day. The two-day format provides a break and time for relaxed discussions outside the scheduled retreat (i.e. evening dinner.)

Select the Setting

The setting and room set-up can impact the plan. Find a location that is comfortable, with natural light and enough space to stretch out and move around. Avoid rooms that are long and narrow. Avoid settings that are loud or have constant interruptions.



U-SHAPED

The room should be set in an open-U board table. Place a flip chart or screen at the open end for presentations and reports. Be ready for break outs if the group wants to work in small groups.

Find a Facilitator

The purpose of a facilitator is to keep the meeting moving – ensuring that the necessary discussions and decisions are achieved in the time allotted. While a member of the board or staff could facilitate, it is a difficult role that sometimes includes political traps.

A hired facilitator can involve everyone and may have to balance discussions so no one person dominates. The facilitator may be the note taker and responsible for drafting the final report.

There is a cost for hiring a facilitator but when you consider the planning retreat is conducted about every 3 to 5 years, the cost is minimal for long term impact. Be sure to provide background materials and briefings so the facilitator can do a good job.

Select the Participants

The *board of directors* is responsible for setting the strategic direction; thus few plans are developed by committees.

The size of the board will have an impact on who is invited. Ideally, planning can be conducted with 12 to 24 people. Fewer people results in less diverse input. More than 24 people make it difficult to keep everyone's attention. More than 30 and microphones and protocols for recognition are required.

If the board is small and there is a desire to get additional input, consider including senior staff, committee chairs, past presidents and emerging leaders.

Survey

Quite often strategic planning is associated with surveying. While surveys and focus groups should be a continual process, there is not a need to link surveying to planning. Ideally the organization has a recent survey that can be referenced at the retreat, but should not be a key focus.

Creating the Plan

The primary purpose of the retreat is to draft a plan. This is done through conversations and consensus. The planning process is the disciplines allocation of resources --- include financial and workforce (volunteers, staff and consultants.)

The secondary purpose of the retreat is to encourage discussions without the protocols of rules of order. The retreat allows for in depth discussions about organizational needs, amending and dropping programs (it is not a setting to simply add more work or a wish list.) Many retreats include discussions of the “elephant in the room,” or the “sacred cow.” The best retreats end with a clarification and honing of the goals and innovative strategies

Set the Scene

Start the meeting by relieving anxieties and promoting comfort. Retreats are often mischaracterized as the place for games and group hugs. Share the day’s agenda and make everyone understands the desired process and outcomes.

Setting the scene is a shared responsibility of the chief elected officer and the executive director. Consider having persons to introduce themselves if not everybody knows each other --- and what they’d like out of the retreat.

Terminology

Be sure everyone understands the terminology of planning. Persons tend to have different understanding of key words (i.e. goals, mission, and strategies) so it is important to discuss the terms to be used in the discussions and plan.

Reports

One of the first discussions will be a review of what is in the prior or existing plan. Report on what was accomplished or is unfinished. In most cases you the prior plan will serve as a foundation for drafting the new plan.

MISSION	
The reason for the organization's existence; its purpose statement.	Crisp and short; easy to articulate and understand.
VISION	
Vivid description and aspiration to describe how the organization desires to be perceived.	For example, “The trusted resource and voice of the industry.”
VALUES	
Guiding principles embraced by leadership and staff.	For example: integrity, transparency and diversity.
GOALS	
Statements that represent where resources will be focused to achieve the mission.	Generally 3 to 7 realistic, well-stated goals. (B.H.A.G. - Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal)
STRATEGIES	
The programs and projects for achieving the goals.	Be realistic, yet innovative, in setting ways to advance the goals.
TACTICS & METRICS	
Deadlines, delegation and key performance measures.	Precise aspects of the plan; often identified after the planning retreat ends.
BUSINESS PLAN	
Translation of the strategic plan into a one-year operating plan.	An internal document to monitor progress.

Other reports and resources to have at the retreat but not to focus too much time and attention on include the bylaws, budget and member survey results.

SWOT

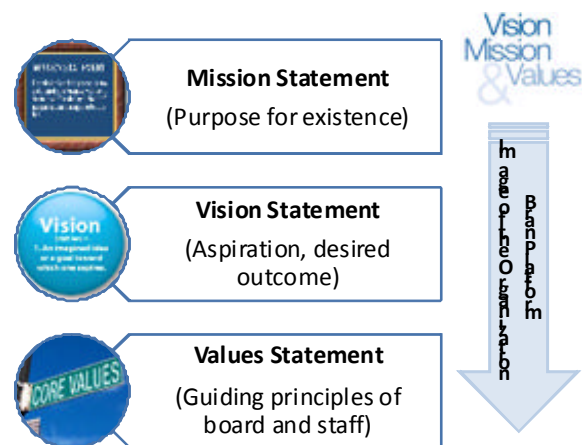
Some retreats include a discussion of the internal (organizational) strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats – called a SWOT. Whether or not the SWOT is a formal discussion, retreat attendees should be well aware and able to articulate internal and external influences.

Brand Platform: Mission, Vision and Value Statements

Because the board is responsible for setting direction, the place to begin is an affirmation or adaptation of the mission statement.

While it is expected that the mission – the purpose for existence – will remain the same, it is common to “tweak” the statement. There may be an expansion or contraction in the industry or profession that would suggest the need to amend the mission. If everyone agrees the discussion will be limited to 30 to 60 minutes, they can get the job done and not feel like they are facing “mission statement misery.”

Some organizations supplement their mission with *optional* vision and value statements. The group will decide whether or not to develop, amend or eliminate the vision and value statements.



Bob Harris, CAE

Goal Setting

Goals are the core competencies (some groups call them the pillars of the organization.) Most associations can hone their priorities in 3 to 7 goal statements.

The plan is a guiding document with short and long-term influence. Discussions are likely to cover direction for the next 3 to 5 years.

While some plans result in a lengthy report, some of the most effective plans are documented in a page or two.

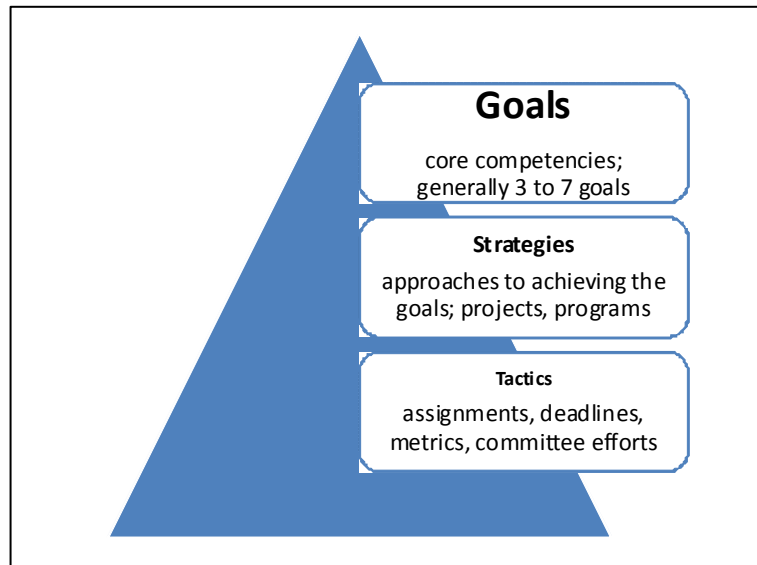
The most common goal categories include:

- Membership
- Education
- Government Relations
- Communications
- Leadership
- Workforce Development
- Organizational Infrastructure

After selecting categories, draft and agree upon what each category means by creating a description or *goal statement*.

In the discussion of goals think of being at the 50,000 foot level; with strategies at the 30,000 – 40,000 foot level. Discussions below 30,000 foot can be characterized as committee or staff work; save that for development of a business plan.

It is easy for discussions to slide “into the weeds.” If that happens, get the group to refocus at a higher altitude appropriate to governance and planning.



Goal Statement and Strategies

Example

Membership Service and Satisfaction	Strategies for Three Years
Providing the benefits and services that give an advantage to business and facilitate participation in the organization.	1) Maintain a market share of 75 percent of the potential members. 2) Develop a new benefit annually that adds economic benefit to members. 3) Create a membership category for technical assistants. 4) Increase members in areas (geographic and specialty) that are obviously weak. 5) Review the package of benefits services to make a board recommendation about eliminating, keeping or improving the benefits.

Strategies

Strategies are approaches to the agreed upon goals. The retreat provides an opportunity to develop innovative programs and solutions.

For example, if Membership is the goal; the strategies might be an expansion of the categories of membership or merger with another organization to increase clout.

Performance Measures

Successful plans may integrate performance measures or metrics. By quantifying outcomes, it is easier to recognize when goals and strategies are reached. For instance, in the goal of membership, the performance measure may be, "Increase market share to represent at least 75% of the potential members within three years." Metrics promote accountability.

Closure

Wrapping up the retreat is more than just adjournment. Take time to be sure that everyone has offered input and nobody is leaving frustrated or upset with the results. This is a good time to identify volunteers and add responsible persons or committees to be sure elements of the plan are advanced.

Implementation

When the retreat is done the real work begins. Some plans get shelved while others are integrated into the systems and culture of the organization. There are a number of steps that can be completed within 30 days to increase likelihood of success.

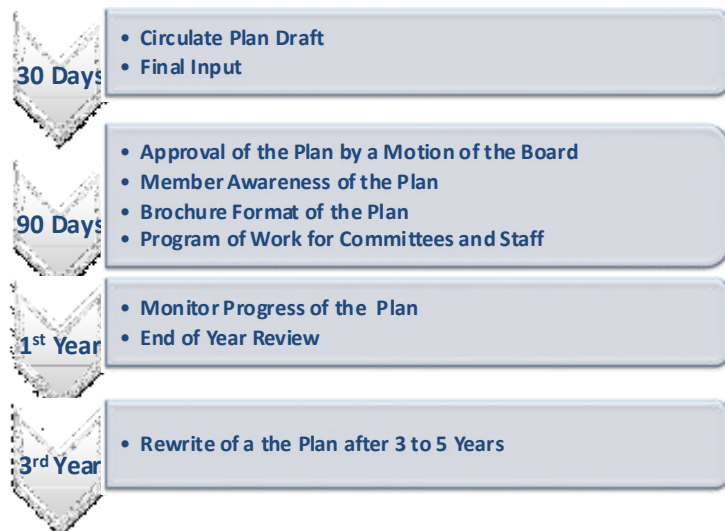
Circulate a Draft

Share a draft of the strategic plan shortly after the retreat. Volunteers deserve to see the results of their efforts. If a director was absent from the retreat, the draft provides a final opportunity to comment.

Approval of the Plan

After the retreat the board should make a motion to officially adopt the plan. The plan, its mission and goals, should be recognized as the official guide for the organization over the next three to five years.

Implementing the Plan



Member Awareness

Promote the new plan, organization direction and the work of the leadership to members and stakeholders. The plan should be compelling and answer the question of why join or support.

Many organizations create a brochure, banner or PowerPoint presentation from elements of their strategic plan.

Business Plan

A one-year business plan or “program of work” supports the three to five year strategic plan. Generally staff creates the business plan in a table format to break down the goals and strategies into smaller tasks with persons or committees taking accountability. It is more precise about deadlines and metrics. It can be used to check off achievements as they are completed.

One Year Review

Elements of the strategic plan should be integrated into every aspect of the association, noted on agendas, referenced in the annual report, promoted in the newsletter for instance. At least annually (usually at the board’s orientation or retreat) the plan should be reviewed for progress.

Throughout the year there will be internal and external factors that influence progress. The one-year review is a time to make adjustments, get back on track or recognize accomplishments.

Plan Rewrite

The plan should span a period of three to five years. At the end of that time, the organization will want to plan another retreat for evaluation of the plan and a rewrite.



Appendix

Ground Rules for Planning

Reduce anxiety and improve results by setting “ground rules” for the planning retreat.

- **Digital Distractions** – Maintain focus by limiting text messaging and calls.
- **Respect People and Ideas** - Encourage new ideas and diverse opinions.
- **Go for Altitude** - Strategic thinking improves at 50,000-feet. Soar like an eagle, avoiding the tree branches and getting in the weeds.
- **Sacred Cows Make the Best Hamburgers** - There is little benefit to protecting an organization's sacred cows. Discussions should be open and honest. A sacred cow is a committee or person immune from criticism for some reason.
- **The Elephant in the Room** - To encourage frank discussions it may be necessary to include topics often ignored because of embarrassment or culture. Nobody should feel uncomfortable discussing the tougher subjects.
- **History Has a Time and Place** - Recalling the good-old-days wastes times and distracts from future oriented perspectives. History does not facilitate future thinking.
- **Games Belong on the Playground** - Retreats have a bad rap from games and group hugs. Avoid the games and base planning on reality, capacity and inspiration.
- **Smarter than a 5th Grader?** – Ask a 5th grader to read the mission statement to see if they know what it means.
- **Caffeine** – Provide chocolate and coffee for a more energetic afternoon.
- **Terminology** - Planning terms are unique; define and agree on terminology at the start.
- **Lock-Down** – Walk-ins and dropouts are distracting. Participants should be involved from start to finish. “Lock-down” ensures the *team* works until completion.

Sustaining the Plan – Implementation Techniques



Sustaining the STRATEGIC PLAN

By Bob Harris, CAE

A strategic plan is an essential element for successful associations. The plan is like a roadmap — positioning the organization, guiding successive volunteer leaders, advising committees, influencing membership and impacting budgets.

The process of planning is invigorating. What happens *after* the planning retreat ends will influence your success or failure.

Many plans collect dust on a bookshelf. Some plans lose traction as the incoming president replaces long-term goals with his or her to-do list. Still other plans become 50-page essays, too long for busy volunteers to read or follow.

Use these seven ideas to ensure your strategic plan's success:

❶ Circulate a *draft* of the strategic plan to participants within 14 days of the retreat. Too often the plan remains on the flipchart pages, taking months to transcribe, while volunteers lose interest. To maintain momentum, get the plan on paper, mark it draft, and ask the leadership to review it one last time before it becomes official.

❷ Adopt the plan as the *official* strategic plan. This avoids an incoming president from negating its value and creating a plan or his or her own. The elected president should work the plan, not create a personal agenda.

❸ Give credit where credit is due. Promote the volunteers and planning retreat with an article and photo of the meeting.

❹ Create a brochure to inform members and stakeholders about the organization's strategic direction and exciting projects. The act of telling members about the plan further commits the leadership to its advancement.

❺ Appoint a "plan champion," a volunteer who monitors the plan's progress. Ideally this will be the incoming president. Or appoint "goal champions" — directors to oversee and report on the strategic goals.

❻ Breakdown the strategic plan into a business or action plan. Schedule a staff retreat to discuss the board's goals. Use a table or matrix format to set performance indicators, timeframes and accountability for working the plan in the short term.

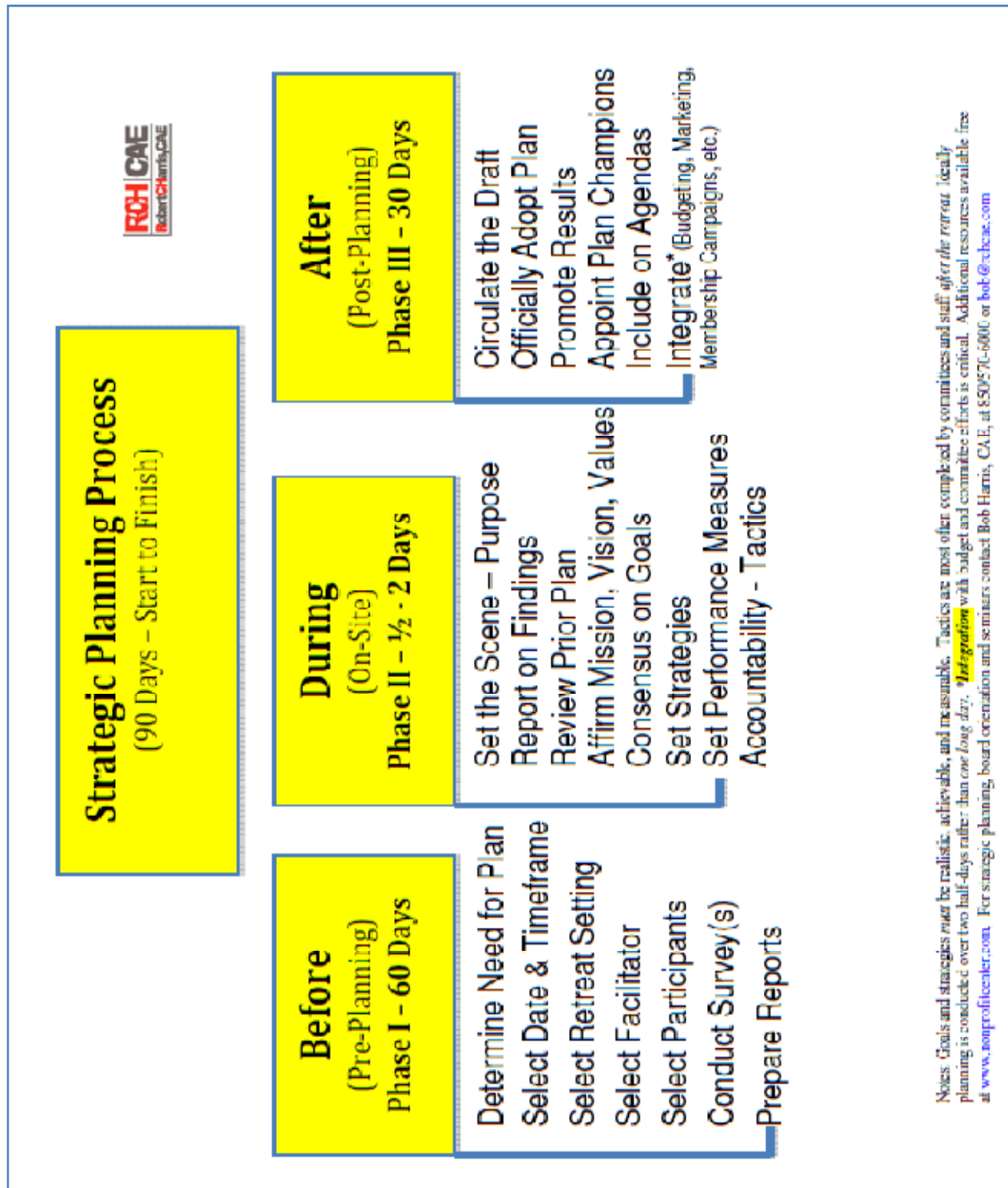
❼ Don't let the adage, "out of sight, out of mind," doom the plan. Include a strategic report on meeting agendas (similar to having a brief financial update at every meeting.) Also, on a yearly basis review the plan and make course corrections. Finally, budget the time and money to completely update the plan every three to five years.

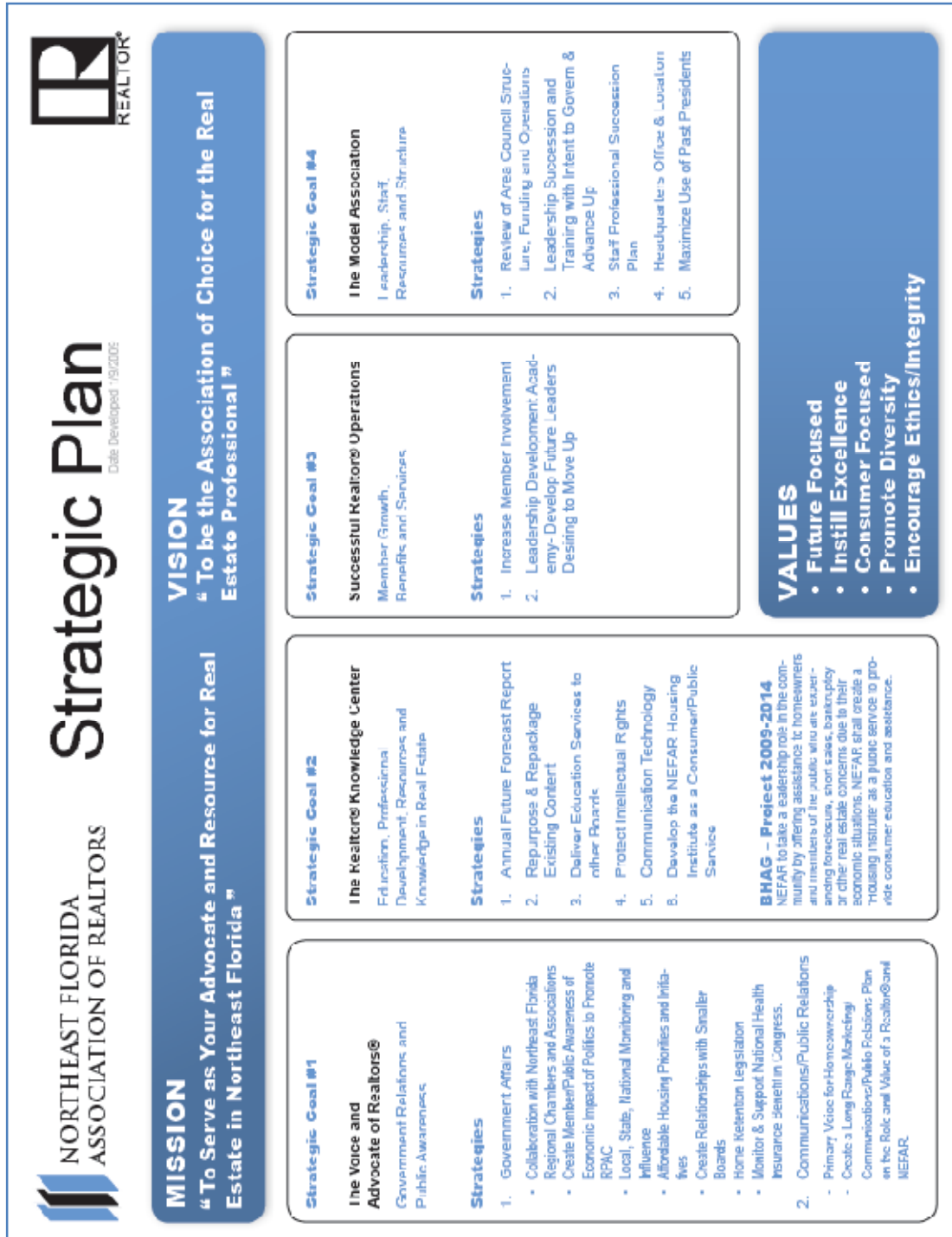
These seven ideas are proven tips for increasing the success and sustainability of your strategic plan.

Note: Bob Harris, CAE, offers free association/chamber management tips and tools at his website, www.nonprofitcenter.com. Contact him at bob@nchcae.com.



90 Day Planning Chart





Two Page Format



Tri-Fold Brochure Format

The Mission Statement essentially describes the business that the Georgia Forestry Association is in.

GFA's new mission statement:

"The Georgia Forestry Association is the leading advocate for a healthy business and political climate for Georgia's forest environment, forest landowners and forest-based businesses."

Every organization should have a set of core values or guiding principles that support its mission.

GFA's guiding principles:

- Free Enterprise and Private Property Ownership Rights
- Open Communications
- GFA Leadership and Vision
- Respect for Diversity of Forest Ownership
- Economic Development and Prosperity
- Sustainable Stewardship of Forest Resources and the Environment
- Trust and High Ethical Standards

GOVERNMENT ADVOCACY

GFA will be the premier forestry advocate, representing the forestry community in the legislative and regulatory processes at state and local levels.

The goals are to:

- Generously fund the Association's political action committee - ForestPAC - to support legislative and other candidates likely to support forestry and forest product businesses
- Recognize those members who contribute to ForestPAC and therefore make GFA's legislative program more effective
- Monitor and influence legislative and regulatory activity to protect forestry's interests. Areas of highest priority include private property rights, environmental regulation, ad valorem taxes, logging ordinances, the right to practice forestry, and transportation issues
- Identify and target relevant groups and

MEMBERS OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The following persons contributed their time to develop GFA's new strategic plan:

Deborah Baker, Georgia-Pacific Corp
 Earl Barrs, Knapp-Barrs and Associates, Inc.
 Darrell Beasley, Beasley Timber Management
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 Geoff Hill, AP SuperTree
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 Steve McWilliams, Tim Lowmore and Carla Rapp - GFA staff

The facilitator for the project was Robert C. Harris, CAE, President, The Nonprofit Center, Tallahassee, FL

1907-2007 GEORGIA FORESTRY ASSOCIATION WE GROW TREES

STRATEGIC PLAN 2007 - 2009

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A Commitment to Delivering Quality and Value to Members And a Prosperous Future for Georgia Forestry

Anatomy of a Mission Statement

ANATOMY OF A

Mission Statement

An organization's **MISSION STATEMENT** communicates its reason for existence. It should complement the IRS submitted "statement of purpose," communicating a concise, compelling image.

It is a board responsibility to determine and advance the organization's mission. The strategic planning retreat is when a board reviews, affirms or updates the statement. Leaders and staff should be able to easily articulate the mission.

Most statements answer three questions: Who we are, whom we serve, and what we offer.

An organization that cannot find its mission statement should reference the IRS Form 990 to reference the "statement of purpose," as well as the preamble to the bylaws and articles of incorporation.

Contemporary mission statements are 15 to 25 words --- conveniently fitting on the back of a business card and the bottom of a meeting agenda. Let clarity determine length.

The primary audience -- persons served by the organization -- should be near the start of the statement. If a secondary audience is identified, (i.e. for the benefit of the public, enhancing the community, suppliers), identify it in the latter part.

Omit references to history or successes; those should be communicated in narratives about the organization.

Do not mistake mission with a vision statement (long-term desired outcome as a result of accomplishing the mission) nor a values statement (principles for governing and managing the organization.)

Promote the mission statement often: on the front page of a website, in the conference room, on coffee mugs and on the back of name tentcards, for instance.

Be cautious not to broaden the mission statement reviewed by the IRS; potentially endangering tax-exempt status

"The Society serves as a leading component, committed to the diverse needs of members by providing and pursuing excellence in advocacy, community service and education"

"The Association is the unrelenting advocate for physicians, ensuring health for all citizens."

"The Chamber helps its members grow and prosper by building relationships, developing their employees, promoting best practices, and by effective political involvement."

Anatomy of a Mission Statement
R.Harris Spring 2008
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Business Plan Template

Goal Area	Strategies to Advance Goals	Action Steps Set Metrics	Costs (Financial, Workforce)	Accountability Deadlines, Who?
1.	1.1			
	1.2			
	1.3			
	1.4			
2.	2.1			
	2.2			

We Are in the Weeds

