

Tips for Writing A Strategic Plan

Ultimately what makes a good strategic plan is one that will actually be used by your organization.

A good strategic plan should....

Tell you where the organization is going, cover the time frame for the plan, and it should identify milestones/performance measures for how the organization will know when it has achieved its goals/objectives/strategies.

Be approachable- easy to understand, easy to read, physically organized so that you if you skim you can take away the major points and yet be able to delve in for the detailed explanation.

- Succinctly communicate what the organization is "about" (mission, vision, values), what it plans to accomplish to achieve its vision, and how it plans to do it within the time frame the strategic plan is valid.
 - **A good measure for doing this is that even a layperson reading your strategic plan could be able to grasp, generally, what your organization is about and where it is headed.
- Label your goals/objective/strategies with a consistent numbering structure so that when discussing the plan, it's easy to tell someone what you're talking about.
 - ** For example, Strategy 1.0, and then under Strategy 1.0 would be Objectives 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 that directly relate only to Strategy 1.0)
- Use the principles of good layout to make it easy for your eyes to move through the document
 - ** Use bolded fonts, larger font sizes, or colors denote separate levels of the document, use graphics (and even better, photos from your work); bullet points can break up dense blocks of text, incorporate white space.
- Keep the length of a strategic plan readable- if it's so long that nobody in your organization would read it, it's too long

Act as a "living" document. Meaning, people in all levels of the organization use the strategic plan to guide their work so that the work being done supports the direction of the organization. The milestones/performance measures outlined in the strategic plan are reviewed regularly in order to make mid-course policy or operational changes that will better achieve the goals/objectives/strategies.

- Get input and buy-in from people that touch key aspects of your work processes. Work with representatives from the various lines of work in your organization to craft

the strategic plan, include both "internal" (e.g.staff) and "external" stakeholders of your work processes (e.g. community based organizations you may contact with)

**Use data to help determine the strategic direction

- Begin the strategic planning process with a firm end to it in sight. A long strategic planning process is demoralizing after the initial burst of energy created by the start of the planning process and makes it harder for people to be interested in adopting the plan later.
 - ** The length of a strategic planning process should be in proportion to the time period that the strategic plan will be used; the shorter the time frame, the shorter the planning process.
- Choose realistic, achievable, actionable goals/objectives/strategies for the time frame allotted.
 - ** To that end, start these goal/objective/strategy statements with a verb.
- Choose performance measures that are measurable given current constraints with data availability and staffing. Reporting on the goal/objective/strategy should not cause undue burden and interruption to daily work processes.
- Market the finished strategic plan to all levels of your organization- half the work for this is achieved while doing the first and second bullets from above!

Here's two strategic plans we like, they're nice examples to inspire your planning....

UCLA School of Public Health Strategic Plan

<http://www.ph.ucla.edu/pdfs/SPHStrategicPlan.pdf>



Good use of graphics and layout makes this strategic plan easy to read. The mission, vision, and strategic goals and objectives are succinct and clearly communicated. The structure of the plan organizes the levels of ideas well. The objectives point to a specific action to take.



Without numbering the objectives, hard to share with someone else which objective you're discussing. Despite the clear, actionable, objectives no performance measures or goals are provided.

National Cancer Institute Strategic Plan

http://strategicplan.nci.nih.gov/pdf/nci_2007_strategic_plan.pdf



Good use of graphics and layout. The photos are a nice way to communicate the work this organization does. The system of numbering strategies and strategic objectives is very clear and easy to follow.



Densely written, making it hard to get information quickly. The uses of carrot symbols instead of continuing with the numbering strategy make it difficult to refer to a statement. Also, some of these statements were almost as general as the strategy above when they should be more specific and actionable. Also no performance measures or goals are provided.