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Informational Report

Strategic Planning

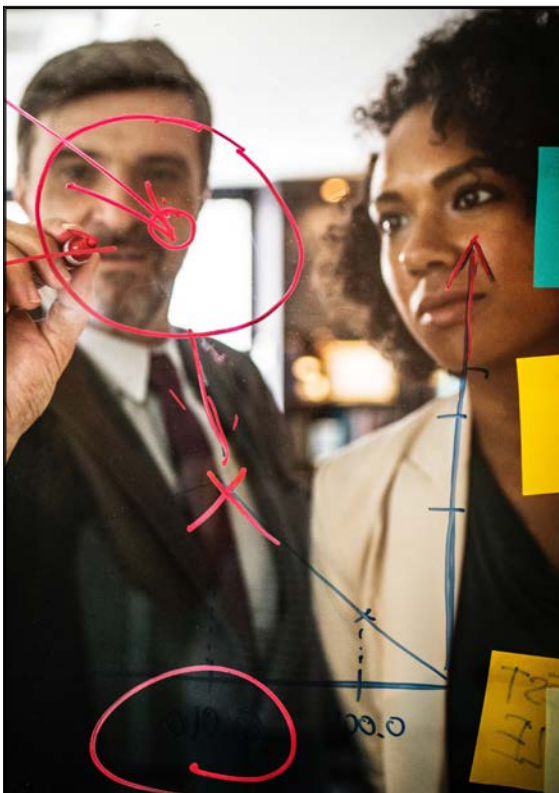
By Ayax Rangel & Paulina Doran

How to design concrete steps to reach specific goals that grow your NGO

What is a strategic plan?

How can it benefit my NGO?

“A strategic plan formally documents all procedures so that board members can jointly formulate a plan to run the organization in the upcoming years.”



Every nonprofit [also called an NGO, a Non-Governmental Organization] needs a strategy to guide operations and measure its progress. A strategic plan formally documents all procedures so that all board members can jointly formulate a plan to run the organization in the upcoming years and decide how their proposal should be best carried out ⁽¹⁾.

By recording this information, an organization can methodically prepare a clear plan and recognize any implementation problems. It can also identify the best methods to address particular concerns or reach targeted goals.





Typically, strategic plans are conceived by constructing short-term aspirations that will meet a long-term purpose. They also have a clear target, so everyone knows what to accomplish. When forming guidance procedures, organizations must assess their current circumstances.

A plan may concentrate on certain issues over others. Based on these focal points, NGOs can then determine if their plan will cover three years, five years, or more. Plans should never be longer than ten years, since plans of that length can become irrelevant to organizational needs.

Nonprofits must develop plans that map governance methods clearly and help administrators with their management duties. Plans should monitor finances, budget expenses, and earnings. In addition, they can cover task implementation with how-to guides or use risk-benefit analyses to help employees make advantageous decisions.

Usually, plans are most practical at certain developmental stages such when a nonprofit is first being built and its structure developed. However, plans may also guide transformative periods in the group's history, when grand obstacles require a new approach.

Though strategic planning involves careful effort and check-ups to monitor success, structuring ideas can lead to great benefits. To begin, an organization will have a clearer direction and more purposeful, effective leaders who know their assignments and the course of action for implementation.

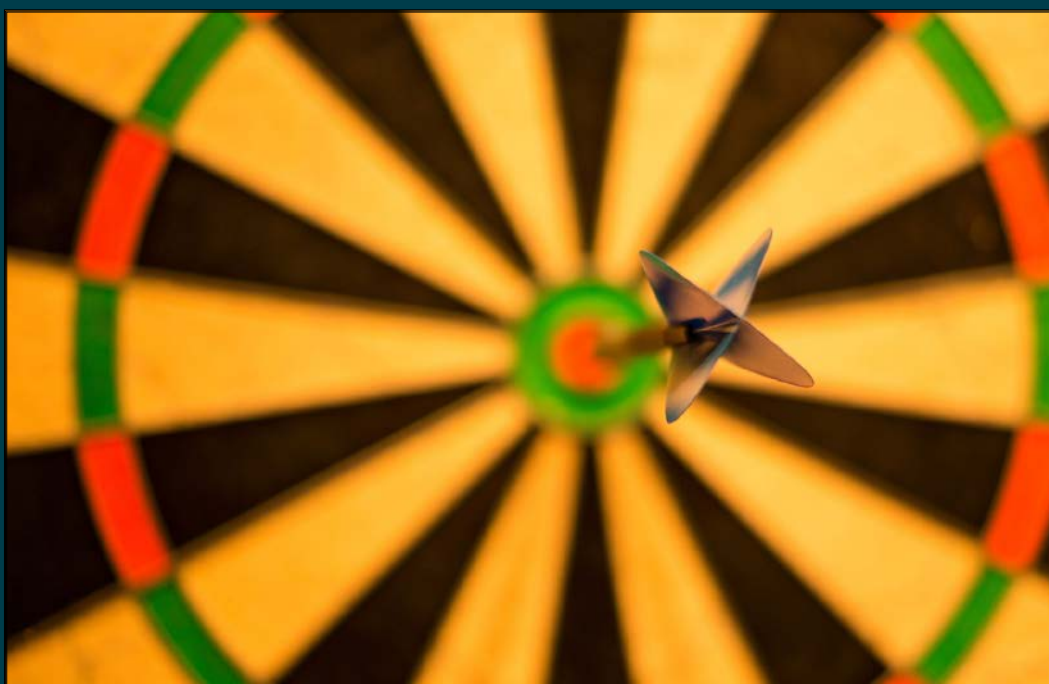


In addition, groups with solid plans stand out among their industry counterparts because they fulfill more objectives and produce tangible results to emphasize their worth. The plans strengthen their leaders' community reputation, so they appear more reliable to stakeholders.



As a best practice, organizations should clearly show donors and investors how they operate and how operations align with their mission. This act can boost patronage from stakeholders.

In general, a plan helps nonprofits define their goals and follow a clear, undistracted path that saves them time and money. Plans can also promote the greater good and derive more positive outcomes, rather than fostering impulsive decisions. Staff become more dedicated to constructive performance to serve NGO constituents.



The roles of the board and the executive director in strategy.

Even after constructing and implementing a plan to run an NGO effectively, some leaders may be confused about their role. Essentially, a plan should involve active participation of several groups such as board members, executives, department managers, employees, clients, and donors.

However, general responsibility is in the hands of the board. The board develops a thorough, evidence-based document that outlines future action and endorses its sensible application ⁽²⁾. Each member should contribute in ways that reflect his or her specialized capabilities. Creating sub-groups for key strategic issues and then allowing others to present their opinions can help in the restructuring process until a plan is officially authorized.

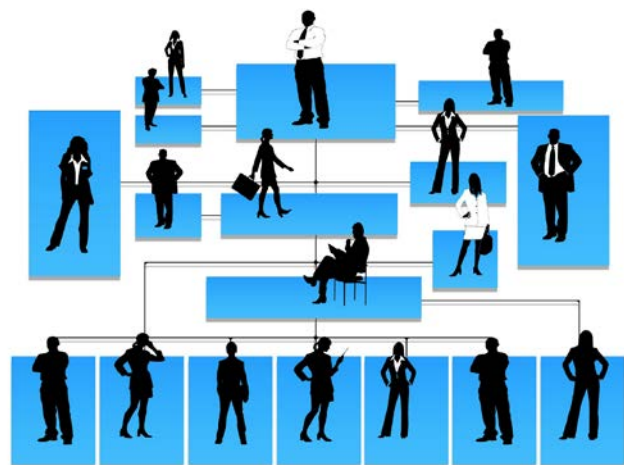
Board members should know the NGO's aims and how the plan fits into that framework. They should also devise a rational document that encapsulates the most innovative, valuable concepts to guide structure.



“The executive director implements ideas whereas operations reflect the board’s decisions.”

On the other hand, the executive director implements ideas whereas operations reflect the board’s decisions. In this way, executives are not sideline collaborators but instead steer the plan processes.

Executives also gather context-relevant documents such as stakeholder evaluations, previous strategic plans, financial records, and assessment outcomes to aid implementation. Executives thus act to identify collection materials for development.

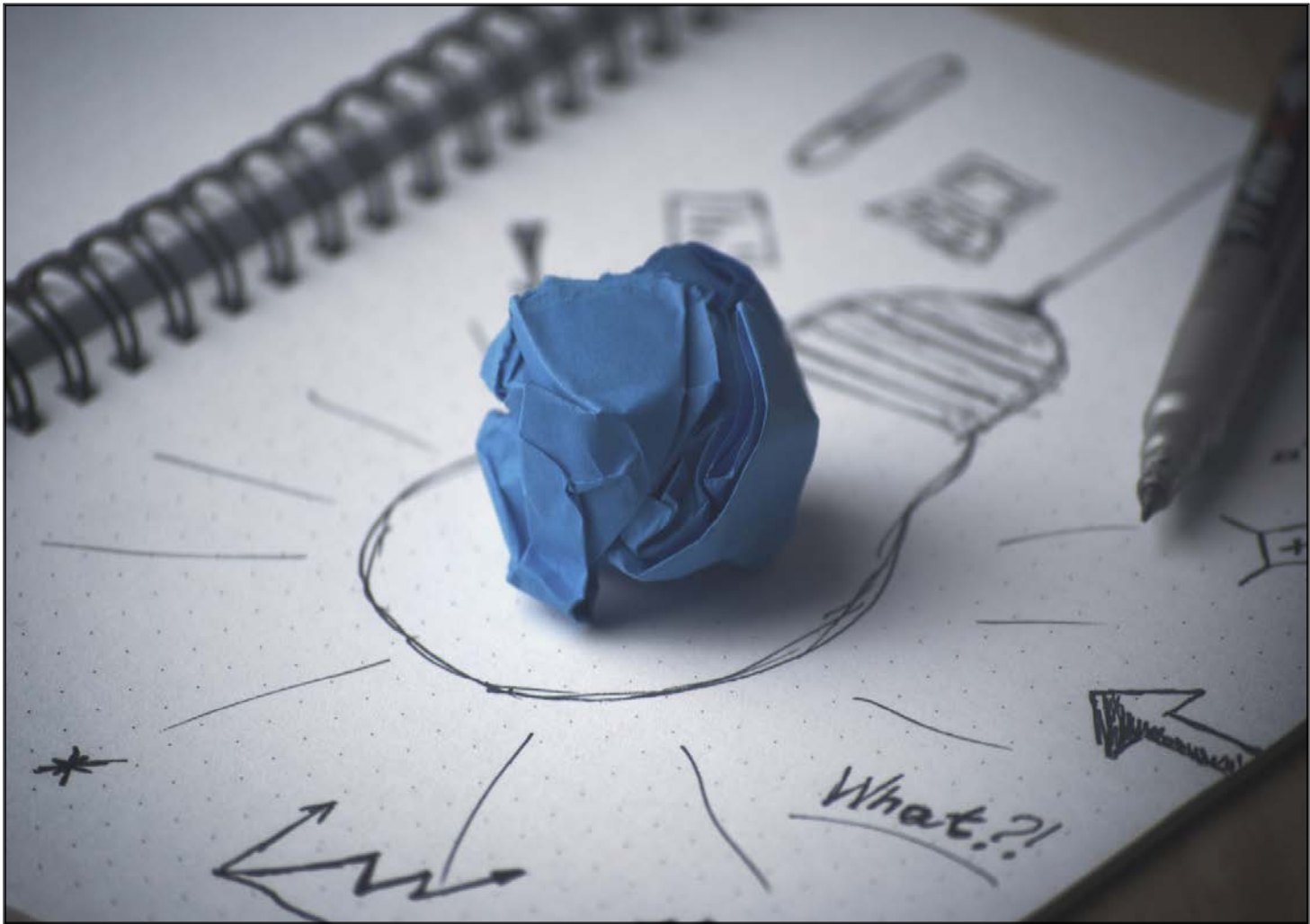


In general, executive directors apply the plan by directing staff to carry out tasks to meet objectives. Without them, a plan would never leave the board or influence operations, halting potential growth.

Strategic planning consultants may also be helpful to the board and director. Organizations can use independent contractors to help them design and implement a plan.

Consultants can simplify and accelerate meetings to get more done in limited amount of time. They can also format and structure plans, outline meetings, and help the director execute procedures to guide staff. Typically, outside consultants can provide objective advice not swayed by internal interests.





Methods and approaches to developing a strategic plan.

In developing a solid strategic plan, a few techniques can ensure more benefits. To begin, an NGO's leadership should attempt to work together ⁽³⁾. No one should work alone in strategizing. Instead, the board and director should meet routinely to formulate and execute a strategy. Every person involved should understand what good results look like in the context of the organization.

Next, NGOs should map out initiatives to build success. Management can approach individual employees, decide their part in the plan, and evaluate the tools required to get the job done. Managers can also assess the available skills of staff, the projected expenses for programs, and stakeholders' current investments of time and money.

NGOs should explore past designed fundraising methods so that they can grow from a developed structure, instead of reinventing the wheel. Board members should inquire about past execution problems. By offering one's opinions about a plan while it is being built, an NGO will develop a stronger initial draft of its strategy.



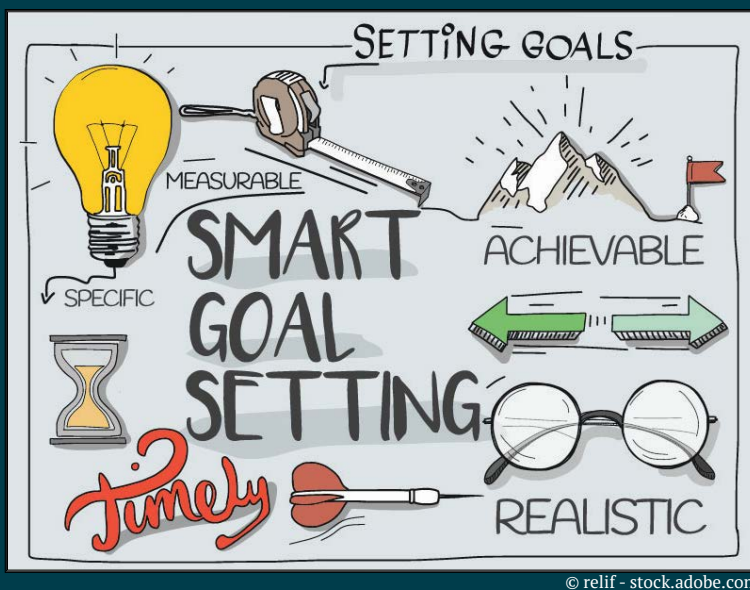


Next, strategic plan designers and implementers should have routine conversations over purpose, structure, and programming. This process allows all stakeholders to share their ideas, to gather conclusions and to present them to the entire board. Key stakeholders can decide to fund particular components of a plan, giving them the green light.

Boards can also use longer plans of three to five years and make them more relevant to the present. Shorter plans can address concerns that arise over a single year, applying modifications to current issues. In addition, boards can create sub-plans that are tailored toward specific organizational topics such as public relations or NGO expansion.

For example, a strategic plan can guide fundraising. Board members can decide what pragmatic but innovative undertakings might best reach funding goals. Fundraising plans require an analysis of past revenue-driving activities. Boards should assess the strongest and weakest initiatives and delineate possible changes to apply in the future.

In any type of strategy, nonprofits must follow SMART guidelines (as defined below) to develop major purposes and smaller aims. Using this method, a person simply breaks down a larger aspiration into defined intentions. A plan documents how to approach a goal to achieve the aspiration, when the goal will occur, where it will be accomplished, and why it is being carried out.



These intentions need to be **Specific** and **Measured** to gauge level of performance. Furthermore, these intentions should be clearly **Achievable** (through task assignments to staff), **Realistic**, and **Timed** (where employees know when projects should be finished).

NGOs can split objectives based on topic area and goals for departments. One department may focus on building corporate sponsors, while another may track the most important clients. These departments will have diverse goals underlying their work, but should all actively monitor their progress and hold staffers accountable to encourage smooth operations. A plan allows an NGO to check off every objective devised, tracking advancement.



NGOs must analyze potential risks when implementing activities into operations. A risk evaluation is necessary because many nonprofits must manage a fluctuating climate, make prompt choices, and adjust responses accordingly ⁽⁴⁾. A risk evaluation also ensures that all entities are ready to handle whatever emerges in a calculated, deliberate manner with innovative techniques and in accord with the group's core mission.



Why is strategic risk management necessary? At its simplest form, strategic risk management allows organizations to integrate revisions advantageously because it accepts that future hazards are likely and that change is inevitable. It also encourages nonprofits to modify dysfunctional areas of a plan, boosting the chance of accomplishment and reducing the chance of collapse.

There are several steps in conducting a risk analysis. To begin, leadership should look at their organizations objectively, determining what they hope to attain and quantifying possible success and failure. In addition, NGOs should weigh consequences of certain outcomes such as the financial price of boosting benefits and limiting risk. This process allows for individuals to understand potential obstacles and then formulate a practical plan to accomplish goals.

Executive heads and board members also must be given resources to improve their skillsets. They must learn how to make informed decisions and appoint employees to complete tasks. Leaders must adeptly identify what data is important to grow their organization.



Managers should consistently pay attention to the operational environment by communicating with and learning from associates. They should also analyze pertinent, applicable texts to address group needs with adroit cleverness and quick-thinking.

Furthermore, leaders should always reflect on their choices, even after the start of the implementation process. Ideas must continue to emerge, even when action is in full swing. NGOs should compare current outcomes with prior negative and positive results. Then, they should use those rational insights to develop a more innovative, profitable plan.

This method works best when leaders are trusted by the employees who work under them and when leaders are self-assured enough in their own competencies.

On the other hand, staff who are open to gaining skills rapidly, are aware of their deficiencies in order to grow, and comprehend the consequences of their decisions will most likely excel at these techniques.

An organization can also incorporate competitive ideas into strategy. Competitiveness in the nonprofit world is not just about winning over other groups, but instead making the greatest impact and attaining value in the larger community ⁽⁵⁾.

NGOs should sustainably stand out from other groups by promoting the uniqueness of their services and innovating operations in order to make widespread societal changes. This act is crucial when grants are scarce and many are contending for the same resources.

In this way, NGOs that plan their operations systematically, employ skilled staff, and showcase worthwhile products that are more likely to succeed. The more value and social good an organization provides its community, the more competitive and viable it becomes.



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NGOs should consider innovative measures to obtain their mission, rather than repeat what has already been practiced. New strategies may conflict with the route of other nonprofits, but may drive an NGO to the forefront.

In using groundbreaking strategies for a competitive advantage, organizations must analyze the most prosperous climate for inventive ideas and map out kinds of innovation to be implemented. Next, individuals must integrate training to apply these innovative ideas and assess how an NGO's structure or operations might influence strategy.

There are several ways to pursue innovation. For example, in the current state of the industry it is difficult to acquire long-term grants. Without these grants, NGOs become less sustainable and consistent for their clients. NGOs must think of new approaches to plan out economic strategy, such as obtaining revenue from outside sources, ensuring longevity of funds, and managing money stringently.



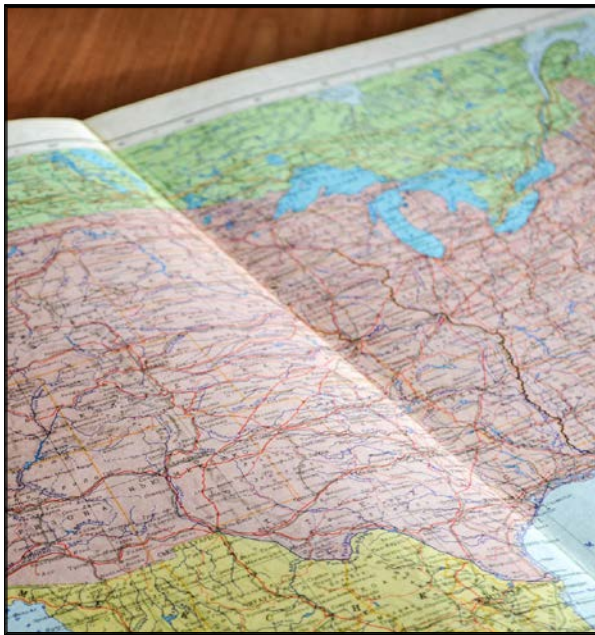
NGOs also often fail to provide programs to their clients and fundraise adequately. These two elements are linked because community programs usually depend on the money collected from donors. Therefore, a strategic plan should highlight efficient ways to increase revenue.

Networking with other non-governmental organizations may help obtain more stable funding. Such partners should also have similar values that support each other's message.

Furthermore, NGOs should innovatively provide their constituents with needed amenities. These changes must apply at all organizational levels and be made in incremental steps. When an NGO is always improving its services, other nonprofits will be less able to mimic those changes because they are constantly shifting based on client needs. For example, an NGO can seek donations from clients' relatives who will then see the tangible benefits of their funding.



“ Research of targeted demographics helps groups look at the likes and dislikes of clients.”



Another way to encourage an NGO's advancement is to analyze the audience for its services. By seeing if constituents are satisfied with an NGO's work, non-profits can evaluate how current plans can be restructured to increase approval. Research of targeted demographics helps groups look at the likes and dislikes of clients and see how their non-profit compares with others.

Nonprofits can also serve a focused group and address its needs. NGOs should put all their efforts toward a chosen cause and approach clients in a similar location. This technique ensures that an NGO can reach people with fewer assets.



“New changes fused into plans should provide clients with useful, beneficial services and promote programs that make a difference in communities.”

Protecting clients should also be a priority. Nonprofits should want to retain their clients so they come back for more services. Making a nonprofit stand out puts it at the forefront of the client's mind and also establishes long-lasting connections.

Over all, a nonprofit should present itself as a mechanism of social change. New changes fused into plans should provide clients with useful, beneficial services and promote programs that make a difference in communities. The goal of competitive planning is to amplify one's influence over other organizations and extend one's positive effect with greater market power.

When the focus is on impact and integrating these methods, clients are more likely to have their needs met with adequate services, improving the longevity of an NGO.

Examples of poor strategic planning.

It is essential to remember that a nonprofit IS a business. It simply has a different tax structure and its profits flow to operations and programs, rather than to shareholders. Non-profit organizations can learn from and adopt lessons from for-profit companies.

Strategic planning and management can make a difference in whether organizations thrive or fail. Some organizations have trouble putting their plan into action or assessing outcomes to gauge progress ⁽⁶⁾. Others may simply lack any planning or management mechanisms, never assigning any assets toward strategy development or fulfilling their organizational objectives. When systematic preparation is forgotten, organization leaders and staff are often unfulfilled and discouraged. They may even abandon the organization, hurting growth potential.



“ It lacked a responsive website to sell products online and lost out to its rivals that adopted revolutionary strategies to differentiate themselves.”

Poor strategic planning has led to the demise of several well-known entities. For example, the company RadioShack once was one of the most lucrative businesses in the electronics industry, consistently selling products for economical prices and drawing in customers ⁽⁷⁾. However, this success was short-lived, since the company's effectiveness began to deteriorate, leading to liquidation of the company's assets.

In many ways, a key problem with the business was that it did not innovate its policies to match its competitors'. It lacked a responsive website to sell products online and lost out to its rivals that adopted revolutionary strategies to differentiate themselves.





Thus, the company was a victim of poor planning. It did not organize its infrastructure or test out tactics to adapt. RadioShack needed a written code to help it identify what was lacking and contemplate how to repair those deficiencies and seize on opportunities.

Kmart also had trouble adjusting to new trends and maintaining relevance. It was unable to retain its customer base who drifted to other establishments such as Walmart ⁽⁸⁾. Kmart eventually terminated 10% of its locations because of its inability to centralize and define its mission -- not establishing how its products differed from its competitors'. In other words, Kmart had a slogan ("To thrive as a mass merchandising company that offers customers quality products through a portfolio of exclusive brands and labels.") that was inherently generic, did not differentiate its brand, or maintain public interest. And all that was a byproduct of not defining its core values in the planning process.

For this reason, work and time should go into formulating a strong, defined mission statement early on, so that a business can stand out. NGOs should also concentrate on a value that makes them exclusive. For example, they can emphasize customer relationships to build loyalty or showcase how a product is a frontrunner in its domain.



Another serious strategic planning flaw occurred with Volkswagen, a popular manufacturer of German vehicles. In 2015, the company committed an irresponsible offense by not following government protocols for environmental emission regulations. This transgression severely damaged its reputation and tarnished its client relationships ⁽⁶⁾.

In many ways, the company lacked ethical standards to guide its procedures. Its executives did not previously evaluate operations using a risk-benefit analysis or judge the negative outcomes of their actions. These mistakes jeopardized VW's economic prosperity. They also demonstrate how a lack of a solid leadership policies can be a major detriment to a business' status. Organizations should be ethical when making decisions or designing a plan to guide their performance.

Examples of successful strategic planning.

However, several nonprofit organizations and for-profit companies have applied best practice techniques for profitable outcomes and for making a lasting impact on their communities.

For example, the Hunger Project Sweden, a nonprofit focused on alleviating hunger, has coordinated a set of procedures to guide it in relieving the world of malnutrition by 2030 and to structure its annual operations ⁽⁹⁾. The group works on specific, innovative challenges such as promoting women's rights, inspiring communities in overcoming poverty, and cultivating viable societies.

In many ways, this NGO's plan is strong because it concentrates on three issues of interest where change can be implemented and describes how each objective will be accomplished with concrete behaviors. It is specific, relevant, and tangibly executed.

Furthermore, the Canadian Mental Health Association, which brings awareness to mental health concerns, has created intentional policies that align with its mission and include relevant objectives ⁽⁹⁾.





This organization remains sustainable because it has defined its mission statement and values in connection to its major concerns. The group has cohesively planned all elements with direct measures to move the mission forward. By removing distractions, the organization's strategic plan propels it towards its purpose and satisfies its stakeholders.



Some corporate brands have also adopted strategies that nonprofits can learn and apply relevant lessons from. One example is the Gamma Corporation which sells clothing and baggage ⁽⁶⁾. The company revitalized itself after a decline in transactions by integrating sales data. It recognized stagnation in development and implemented procedures

to halt the problem. Gamma created sub-retailers to retain customers and increase its market presence. Sales multiplied because the company made a focused goal to diversify financial sources and split profit streams.

The visionary brand of Apple, which markets iPhones and other devices, has also garnered mass public appeal through its cutting-edge tactics ⁽¹⁰⁾. Rather than rushing its products to market, Apple waited to release them until features were optimized for professionals. By doing so, Apple was able to assess the oversights of competitors.



Other businesses have focused on incorporating ideas in their plans to develop their managers, providing them with learning opportunities to guide their processes and build their skills. A U.S. Sunbelt producer of technological machinery focused on implementing tasks. The company looked at leadership issues in departments, analyzing environmental obstacles. It then provided managers with tools to help them adjust to difficulties and solve problems themselves.



As follows, the company trained its managers, ensuring they had access to skilled staff to aid them. Then, the managers explored new processes to be implemented into future plans. These processes included reorganizing infrastructure to increase operating efficiencies, to decrease expenses, and to reduce prices.

In the training sessions, managers considered program costs, opportunities to invest money, decision consequences, and implementation possibilities. This innovative technique allowed the company to teach managers using real life examples, while also producing solid business strategies to decrease operational expenses by over 17%.

Strategic planning resources.

Luckily, NGOs enjoy a surplus of resources to help prepare their strategic plans, collect information, design clear goals, implement ideas, and assess performance.

The Washington Nonprofit Institute (WNI) provides several planning tools to help nonprofits get started⁽¹¹⁾. One tool is [an agenda](#) for an introductory meeting about strategic development. Individuals can assess issues impacting the organization, types of plans to use, and labor allotted to key initiatives. With this agenda, the process becomes more open and integrative.

In addition, the institute provides [a worksheet](#) to assess an NGO's current condition and to refine policies. It helps organizational heads to spread their messages, develop stronger connections, and influence their constituents. The WNI also has tools to evaluate human resources, public relations, and economic management.





Another beneficial resource is the [mission assessment tool](#) which is a quiz-like form to test one's organizational mission and figure out whether it is memorable, concise and readable. This worksheet helps leaders and staff understand their nonprofit's purpose.

Moreover, the WNI has also created [a resource](#) for planning, so that any proposal is structured for successful implementation. Proper planning emphasizes key topics of interest, focusing the NGO's initiatives on vital issues. A handout states what exactly will be done so that outcomes are easier to visualize. The tool can assess whether a plan is feasible, judge whether its scope is appropriate, outline motivating factors for staff implementation, and help leaders establish SMART objectives.



Finally, the Institute's website establishes steps to implement and assess a strategic plan. The organization has [a digital workbook](#) with a strategic needs table to lay out goals and list associated competencies that must be carried out. The WNI also supplies an inventory to list abilities of board members to be capitalized on. This ensures that the plan is put into use and not lost during operations, never to be applied.

The Spark Policy Institute also has a [digital adaptive planning toolkit](#) that provides several roadmaps to expand NGO impact, estimate the future, respond to obstacles, decipher points of investment, and formulate immediate and longstanding plans⁽¹²⁾. These tools are all available online for free to help organizations transform their operations for maximal gain.



“A variety of books can save time in structuring and carrying out a deliberate strategy.”

A variety of books can save time in structuring and carrying out a deliberate strategy. The La Piana Consulting offers two helpful texts, which include *Play to Win: The Nonprofit Guide to Competitive Strategy* and *The Nonprofit Strategy Revolution*⁽¹³⁾. The former discusses competing against other nonprofits in an oversaturated market. The latter emphasizes techniques to use in a fluctuating climate, giving NGOs the tools to adapt.

The Free Management Library has also a beneficial list of texts related to strategic planning⁽¹⁴⁾. Some notable works include *Field Guide to Nonprofit Strategic Planning and Facilitation* by Carter McNamara and *The Board Member's Guide to Strategic Planning: A Practical Approach to Strengthening Nonprofit Organizations* by Fisher Howe.

Each book takes a comprehensive, but accessible, look at the process to assist beginners. Each is also written specifically for nonprofit audiences to match the specific needs of aid organizations.

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Ayax Rangel



Ayax is a foreign language professor at the Defense Language Institute in Fort Bragg, NC. In this capacity, he imprints language and cultural competence on Special Operations Forces Soldiers of the US Army. As a war veteran with seven years of military service, he was honorably discharged in the fall of 2017 with an exemplary record. In his last role, Ayax was responsible for managing a portfolio that included: personnel recovery, training procurement, foreign language readiness, and equal opportunity for 1st Battalion, Psychological Operations (PSYOP), US Army, assigned to South America as its primary area of responsibility. Associated duties required constant vigilance of political developments abroad and assessment of threats posed to fellow deploying service members.

Other assignments within the organization include an overseas deployment to the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, as a program manager for a PSYOP team and a rotation in 5th Battalion PSYOP, requiring military training in Asian regional studies and Mandarin Chinese.

Before his arrival at PSYOP, Ayax deployed as an Infantryman on a combat tour to Kandahar, Afghanistan in the summer of 2012 as part of Operation Enduring Freedom with the 3rd Infantry Division.

Ayax has further distinguished himself as an active member of his community. He currently serves in the NCPTA Board of Directors (2018-2020 term), in the Resource Development, Governing Documents, and Executive Committees, and has been appointed a Human Relations Commissioner for the City of Fayetteville, NC (2018 - 2020 term). In 2018, Ayax received the honor of being selected to the Fayetteville Observer's 40 under 40 for distinguished community service.

He is also a volunteer at the Auerbach Global-Impact Foundation (AGIF), a nonprofit. As Director of Research some of his duties include developing plans of action, conducting target audience analyses, producing reports and targeted messaging, training and supervising staff, and collaborating with the Executive Director on strategy and delivery.



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Paulina Doran



Paulina is a recent graduate from Drury University (Springfield, MO) who received her Bachelor of Arts in psychology and writing. During her time in academia, she facilitated a support group for clients with chronic illness and physical disabilities at Circle on the Square (Springfield, MO), a holistic life center and mental health facility, using therapeutic coping techniques from positive psychology. She was also vice president of her local Sigma Tau Delta chapter.

Currently, she is a fellow at the AGIF and assists the research department in collecting data for its library of tools and resources geared toward marketing, leadership, human resources, strategic planning, and data management for nonprofits. She also has assisted in devising strategic marketing plans by conducting analyses for key target audiences. Her other duties include planning and implementing usability studies and surveys for website development.

In her spare time, she does independent contracting with companies like UserTesting, participating in usability tests and moderated studies for UX design, development, and research of applications and websites. In addition, she runs her own online retail and consignment store, where she resells vintage goods and inventory to the public on the Poshmark app.

In the future, she plans to eventually pursue a career in user-experience research and obtain her master's degree in human-computer interaction. She hopes to focus her studies in exploring accessible features for individuals with auditory and visual disabilities, providing them more functional tools to navigate and interact with mobile and desktop platforms.

