

Three Reasons Not to Plan

By Peter Brinckerhoff



They're common excuses, but here's why you need to think beyond them.

"If you don't know where you're going, you'll wind up someplace else."

The quote above is from that famous American philosopher Yogi Berra. And he's right. Think about it: Would you go on a trip to a new town without a plan of how to get there? Would you load up your stuff and go to the first intersection and say, "Hmmm, which way?" and then make a choice at that intersection, and the next, and the next, without a larger plan? Of course not. You might go in circles or wind up in some very dangerous places.

So why isn't planning done regularly and everywhere? Because people resist planning for a number of (frankly) lame, but understandable, reasons:

I don't have the time. Yes, you do. You have 24 hours each day like the rest of us. And planning is a key part of mission development. It focuses your organization, sets priorities, and gives you the rationales to pursue one area of service while avoiding others.

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Plans are never used. That may be true — but only if you design the process that way or use an outsider to write your plan. The more inclusive you are in the process, bringing in ideas from your board, staff, and community, the more ownership there'll be in actually implementing the plan. The more you hold yourself accountable for the plan's goals and objectives (in board and staff meeting reviews) the more likely they are to come to fruition.

Plans are restrictive. What if things change? That's just the point. Things will change, and a plan helps you set priorities and focus on what you do best for the people who need you the most. Of course, you need to be flexible. Design your plan so that you can adapt it, not abandon it, when changes come along.

Understand that when we talk about planning, we're not talking just about the document. The plan itself is only part of the outcome: The process is key as well. It can bring senior staff and board members together for full-fledged discussions about issues, trends, core competencies, and outside

influences in a setting and with a depth that won't happen at any other time. This breeds a deeper understanding of the various perspectives around the table.

Planning is work, but very, very valuable work. Having a long-term focus is good stewardship. ■

Planning to Plan

Use these *Nonprofit World* articles (available at www.snpo.org) to make your plan a reality:

- **Ten Steps to Excellence: Moving Your Organization from Mission to Action** (Vol. 15, No. 2)
- **Needed: A Better Grasp of Strategic Planning** (Vol. 24, No. 5)
- **How to Keep Your Plan Off the Shelf** (Vol. 12, No. 2)
- **Don't Give Up on Strategic Planning: 10 Keys to Success** (Vol. 22, No. 3)
- **Planning: What Every Board Member Should Know** (Vol. 11, No. 3)

Peter Brinckerhoff is president of Corporate Alternatives, Inc., www.missionbased.com, peter@missionbased.com. You can view the current issue of his newsletter at www.missionbased.com/newsletters/currentnewsletter.htm, and sign up for a free subscription by e-mailing subscribe@missionbased.com.