



# Your Strategic Plan Sleeps in a Drawer

Don't let it happen to you. These tips will keep your plan alive and awake.

By Bruce Glasrud

After toiling over a strategic plan, many nonprofits glance at it only occasionally to check off one step-function or the other. Quarterly, or even only yearly, they pull the document out of a file drawer and check off this, that, or some other goal as if the plan were a glorified grocery list. Board diversity, check. Program funding, check. Social media, check.

Plan, yes. Strategic, no.

Another problem with many strategic plans is that they're the sole purview of the board and top management. And even for them, the plan often serves more as a coffee cup pad than an active guide.

Frame the conversation with specific wording from the strategic plan.

Here are tips to keep your strategic plan from becoming a lifeless document, periodically dragged out to check your, *yeah-right*, progress:

- **Give a copy to everyone** in the organization, from the executive director to the janitor. Nonprofits always say they have a “dedicated staff.” But how can you expect people to be dedicated to your goals if they don't quite know what they are? Remember that your lower-level staff (including your volunteers)

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are often your first-line ambassadors to the community. Therefore, their need-to-know is quite valid.

- **Check in at random** with board, staff, and volunteers on various points of the plan. Even those with no direct responsibility for a certain strategy or goal can offer excellent feedback, if someone takes the trouble to ask.

- **Use the language of the plan** as a leadership tool. In discussing even day-to-day operations with anyone in the organization, frame the conversation with specific wording from the strategic plan. Certainly do this at staff meetings and board meetings, but also in daily informal conversation.

- **Take your strategic plan along** whenever you leave the office. And as you talk with your peers, funders, suppliers, and, heck, even the people you serve, solicit feedback on your goals and progress. You'd be surprised how pleased people are to be consulted and to have the chance to offer suggestions.

Take your strategic plan along whenever you leave your office.

By actively using your strategic plan in daily operations and conversations, you'll insure your strategic document is put to practiced use. But you'll also be creating something else: You'll be creating a strategic organization! ■

*Bruce Glasrud (<http://thirdsectorhorizons.com>, [info@thirdsectorhorizons.com](mailto:info@thirdsectorhorizons.com), 651-336-9229) is a futurist, specializing in anticipatory management strategies for nonprofits.*

Use the language of the plan as a leadership tool.

## RESOURCES

- Craft, Ralph & Ronald Benson, “Needed: A Better Grasp of Strategic Planning,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 24, No. 5.
- Glasrud, Bruce, “Thinking Out of Pandora's Box,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No. 2.
- Wendell, Bart, “Taking Action to Manage Change,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 29, No. 1.

These resources are available at [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members). Also see Learning Institute programs online: Strategic Planning and Outcome Measurement ([www.snpo.org/lino](http://www.snpo.org/lino)).