

# Three Simple Steps to Activate Your Strategic Plan



Creating your plan is just the first step. Here's how to put that plan to good use.

By Michele V. Gee

You've read the articles explaining that you need a strategic plan to guide your organization. You know your planning process should involve a broad range of stakeholders and clarify your organization's mission statement, internal capabilities, external conditions, goals, objectives, and strategies.

Most likely you've engaged in such a process. But, if you're like many nonprofit leaders, your next step was to file the plan away.

Nonprofit leaders often shelve the strategic plan – sometimes for years! They may dust it off if a potential funding source asks to see it. But they don't give copies to board or staff members who later join the organization. They don't use the plan as a basis for major decisions or refer to it in important meetings.

Not using the strategic plan is one of the most common mistakes nonprofit organizations make. Don't let it happen to you! Here are three steps to assure that you use your plan well:

**1. Be sure to develop** an action plan (sometimes referred to as an operating plan or implementation plan) as part of the strategic planning process. The action plan should do the following:

- Describe major goals, objectives,

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and strategies, both long-term and short-term.

- Pinpoint who is responsible for completing each task.
- Provide deadline dates for completion.

**2. Have the executive management team review the results of the action plan** every six to 12 months and report these results to the board. This step serves two purposes:

- It ensures greater accountability for results.
- It keeps the attention of board members and executives focused on the strategic plan.

**3. Monitor progress** in reaching goals and objectives. At regular intervals, review the assumptions used in developing the strategic plan. The environment in which you operate is constantly shifting. For example, there may be changes in laws and regulations, funders' policies, or the demographic composition of your clients. As a result, you may need to adjust your plan's goals, objectives, strategies, and deadline dates. Be sure to communicate such changes to the board immediately.

Implementing these three recommendations will enhance your organization's effectiveness. Your strategic plan provides a sound framework to guide your decisions, meet challenges, and fulfill your mission, so activate it! ■

## Resources

Brinckerhoff, Peter, "Three Reasons Not to Plan," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 26, No. 1.

Craft, Ralph & Ronald Benson, "Needed: A Better Grasp of Strategic Planning," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 24, No. 5.

Mittenthal, Richard, "Don't Give Up on Strategic Planning: Ten Keys to Success," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 22, No. 3.

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

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