

Strategic Planning Project

Estimated timeline of project: 6 months

Number of BVA consultants on project: 4

Strategic planning vs. business planning

A business plan explains the “who/what/how/where/when” and typically will answer questions such as: “Who are the nonprofit’s “customers?” “What is the geographic area for the nonprofit’s services?” “What other nonprofits are providing similar services?” and “What services does our nonprofit deliver that are unique?” A business plan is the action plan, identifying the tasks, milestones, and goals, but also identifying the potential for success and the potential risks ahead, given the nonprofit’s “competitive advantages” and the environment in which it operates.

The strategic plan takes all that the business plan has identified and answers “how” the desired results will be achieved, such as “How will we accomplish all this with limited resources? What will we prioritize?” Other questions that a strategic plan might answer include: “What needs to happen so that we can achieve success?” and “How will we measure success?”

Example: One finding from a nonprofit’s “business plan” could be the need to diversify financial resources. The strategic plan might then address how the nonprofit will diversify its resources, such as by enlarging the nonprofit’s individual donor base, and then drill down to identify how that will happen, such as through the tactic of developing an annual giving campaign; and further, how that tactic could be sustained, such as by identifying the cost of staff needed to support that activity on an ongoing basis.

*National Council of Nonprofits

Strategic planning vs. adaptive planning

Strategic planning projects tend to plan for 3-5 years in the future. What do we want to accomplish as an organization over the next 3-5 years and how do we get there? For example, if an organization wants to increase their individual giving by 20% by the end of FY2019, what actions need to take place to get there?

Adaptive planning is more short-term strategy for an organization. What are the goals for the organization in the next 1-2 years? Adaptive planning allows for quicker changes and adaptations to be made to the goals based on the internal and external environmental factors. Adaptive planning is more flexible than a traditional strategic plan and plans for the now and immediate future.

Both versions aid in getting all board and staff pointed in the right direction for moving forward with strategic goals, assign areas to individuals, provide deadlines, etc. for implementation. Delegating an individual to provide oversight of implementation will be key to success.

How to know if you're ready for a strategic plan

- Your staff and board have the capacity to fully engage with your BVA team for a minimum of 6 months.
- Staff and board are aligned on organization's mission.
- You're at a position for growth and want to get your house in order before growth outpaces capacity.
- You have an engaged Board of Directors.
- You're starting to think about the long-term success of the organization and no longer in a start-up phase.
- Organization is not in crisis mode
- You have an idea of what is holding you back as an organization and how to overcome those hurdles.
- You're prepared to tackle tough questions about the organization's past, present and future, and have an open mind.

Background materials that your BVA team may request (if you have them)

- Any previous strategic plans
- Board of Directors list
- Organizational charts
- List of stakeholders
- Mission/Vision/Values statement
- Board Bylaws
- Business plan
- Financials/Budget/Audit, etc.

Potential deliverables

- Power Point presentation outlining summaries and 3-year plan
- Excel Document with goals, deadlines, responsible parties, etc.