

Strategic Planning

Key Principles in Effective Not-for-Profit Strategic Planning

By Brenda B. Asare

President & CEO, *The Alford Group*



Do you feel as if your organization is reacting to the environment rather than proactively developing a plan to thrive? The Alford Group is frequently contacted by not-for-profit organizations in need of a cohesive vision and actionable plan for the future. If you have never put together a strategic plan for your organization, or if you find your strategic plan sitting unused on the shelf, consider the following key principles which can guide a successful strategic planning process and serve as metrics against which current strategic plans can be measured.

1. Building consensus regarding organizational vision and future plans is critical to success.

A vision is the cornerstone of a strategic plan and should be the unifying aspiration from which all objectives, strategies and actions are based. Developing a vision provides opportunities for conversation with internal and external audiences that leads to greater ownership. Without a vision, a plan becomes a series of disjointed strategies and tactics.

2. Involving key stakeholders creates essential support of the plan.

A strategic plan requires focused and coordinated efforts throughout the organization – and in order to inspire action and follow-through, key stakeholders must see their role as part of the larger picture.

“An effective strategic plan unleashes the possibilities.”

*-Andy Shaw, CEO
Better Government Association*

3. Effectively and objectively scanning the environment allows the organization to adjust and grow.

An organization’s potential for success is significantly impacted by its ability to anticipate the environment in which it will be operating and to determine how its core competencies can be best utilized in that environment. In some cases, planning may involve strategies to adjust and revise core competencies to meet the environment. **Rigid ideology is a barrier to success.**

4. Planning that reflects contingencies for uncertainties allows for adaptability.

No amount of environmental scanning eliminates all unknowns – so building in flexibility makes the plan a tool that allows the organization to thrive in scenarios that are not yet clearly defined.

5. The strategic plan is a tool, not an end unto itself.

The most important principle of strategic planning is that the plan is merely a roadmap. Its success is dependent on coordinated action led by staff and volunteer leadership as well as frequent communication along the way to measure progress and make adjustments.

Contact us for more information: Chicago (312) 929-4646 | Seattle (206) 548-0451