



# Strategic Planning

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### What is strategic planning?

A strategic plan provides a direction for an organization (Barksdale & Lund, 2006). Strategic planning is a “deliberative, disciplined approach to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it” (Bryson, 2011, pp. 7-8). Effective strategic planning promotes strategic thinking, acting and learning; takes into account the big picture vision and consequences of the organization’s actions on broader systems, paired with on-the-ground specific, targeted actions; prepares for changing trends rather than reacting to urgent issues; is flexible and practical; and determines not only where an organization is going and the actions needed to make progress, but also how it will know if it is successful (Bryson & Alston, 2011, p. 3).

### Benefits of strategic planning

The strategic thinking process and written plan direct attention to the important issues and challenges. The process provides stakeholders an opportunity to listen to opinions, build consensus on the organization’s direction (McNamara, 2019), and understand the consequences of its actions on broader systems in the community. Strategic planning enhances organizational effectiveness, responsiveness and resilience. Communication, organizational structure, technology, services and products can be enhanced with strategic thinking (Bryson, 2011). A strategic plan builds an organization’s value and credibility.

### What does strategic planning help organizations do?

Organizations experience shifting challenges, such as varying budgets, unexpected mandates, staff turnover, and new community issues or needs. Those that have a clear vision of what they want to be and respond proactively to challenges effectively are more prepared to handle changes and prosper (Bryson & Alston, 2011). Strategic planning helps organizations evaluate their past performance to pinpoint successes and major problems (Barksdale & Lund, 2006). Organizations explore trends that affect the way they do business and define or frame the issues or challenges they are facing. Strategic planning guides organizations to communicate their mission, values, decisions, the action plan and creates a vision for where the organization wants to be. Formulating strategies to meet mandates, fulfill missions, accomplish goals, honor values, realize visions are key reasons for organizations to engage in strategic planning. Strategic planning supports organizations in linking actions and results to operational planning such as information technology, human resources, financing, etc. (Bryson & Alston, 2011).

### Consequences of not implementing a strategic plan

Rapid economic, political, technological, social and environmental changes can negatively affect an organization without a strategic plan (Bryson, 2011). Lack of direction, undefined goals and constantly changing priorities can lead to decreased

productivity, inappropriate allocation of resources (Barksdale & Lund, 2006) and a lack of unity and low morale (Olsen, 2019). Inefficient communication; complacency among leaders, employees and stakeholders; and entrenched perspectives that limit long-term thinking about major changes that could impact the organization are possible consequences of not using a strategic plan (Olsen, 2019).

### **Who should be involved in the planning team?**

One of the first tasks of a strategic planning process is to identify key decision makers, individuals, groups or departments that should be involved in the work. An agreement should be established to determine who should be involved in the planning team. Some of the steps in this planning model may include additional members, such as conducting a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) analysis or stakeholder needs assessment. Other steps may limit the group to a small team, such as strategy formulation or action planning. Planning team members should understand the purpose for the planning process, the steps involved, the amount of time to which they will commit, and why their participation is needed. A group of nine or less should be knowledgeable about the organization and committed to the planning process (Bryson, 2011). The individuals who assume the roles listed below are essential for a successful effort:

- Sponsor — an individual with status, power and authority to commit the organization to planning and hold people accountable for actively participating
- Champion — an individual who leads the implementation effort and manages the planning effort on a day-to-day basis
- Coordinator — a support person to arrange meetings, record key information, type flipchart notes and

end reminders to planning team members regarding assignments and meetings

- Implementers — individuals responsible for creating and implementing the plan
- Stakeholders — those who would most affect or be impacted by the planning effort
- Facilitator — a person, serving as a neutral party, who guides the planning process by posing questions to help the group work together effectively (Hinds et al., 2005)

### **What are the steps to strategic planning?**

Three fundamental questions must be asked throughout a strategic planning process: 1) Who and what are we, what do we do now, and why? 2) What do we want to be and do in the future, and why? 3) How do we get from here to there? The process to answer these questions is cyclical and can begin at many steps listed below and within the Strategic Planning Process Cycle (Bryson & Alston, 2011).

#### ***Plan the Process***

The purpose of the first step of the planning process is to initiate and agree on the overall process. Key decision makers of the strategic planning process determine desired outcomes, the schedule, planning tasks, and the elements needed for success (Bryson & Alston, 2011). The following items are completed before the planning effort is begun:

- Readiness assessment
- Why do a plan?
- Who to involve?
- What will be done?
- When will it be done?
- Desired outcomes of the process

### ***Mission, Mandates and Environmental Assessment***

The planning team needs to consider the actual and perceived constraints on the organization imposed by formal bylaws, policies, codes and regulations; and by informal mandates, such as the internal culture or community and/or stakeholder expectations. The organization should review and update the mission and continue to revisit it throughout the planning process. Assessing the organization's values helps clarify how the organization wants to operate and relate to stakeholders (Bryson & Alston, 2011). Conducting an environmental assessment includes:

- Clarify mandates, mission and values
- Conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges (SWOC) analysis
- Articulate a vision

### ***Strategic Issues***

Identifying strategic issues is the keystone of strategic planning. One method of identifying issues is to conduct an analysis of the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities, challenges and threats outside of the organization. The facilitator provides a number of dot stickers to each planning member, and each person places their dots on the issues that carry the highest importance. This voting method helps the group assess the issues. Framing the issues impacts how goals and strategies are formulated and implemented (Bryson & Alston, 2011). In this step, planning team members:

- Identify issues
- Assess issues

### ***Strategy Formulation and Action Steps***

A strategy is formulated when a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, projects, decisions, actions and resource allocations

are established to address each priority issue (Bryson & Alston, 2011). Once the following steps are accomplished, the mission can be fulfilled, mandates met, and goals achieved:

- Formulate strategies based on issues
- Prepare draft strategic plan
- Define action steps

### ***Plan Review and Adoption***

For a single organization, this step can be combined with the strategy formulation and action planning. A large organization, collaboration or community will need to adopt the plan (Bryson & Alston, 2011). To have a useful plan that the team agrees upon, the following actions should be taken:

- Review draft plan
- Adopt plan
- Set schedule/timeline
- Assign responsibility
- Define outcomes

### ***Plan Implementation and Reassessment of Process and Strategic Plan***

This step brings the strategic plan to life when an effective implementation procedure and action plan are executed (Bryson & Alston, 2011). For a strategic plan to be useful and effect change, the organization needs to:

- Implement action steps
- Evaluate results
- Re-evaluate outcomes

### ***Conclusion***

Leaders of successful organizations focus on the most important issues and adopt strategies that respond to crucial challenges. Organizations that experience success over long periods of time are competent in learning, thinking and acting strategically (Bryson & Alston, 2011).

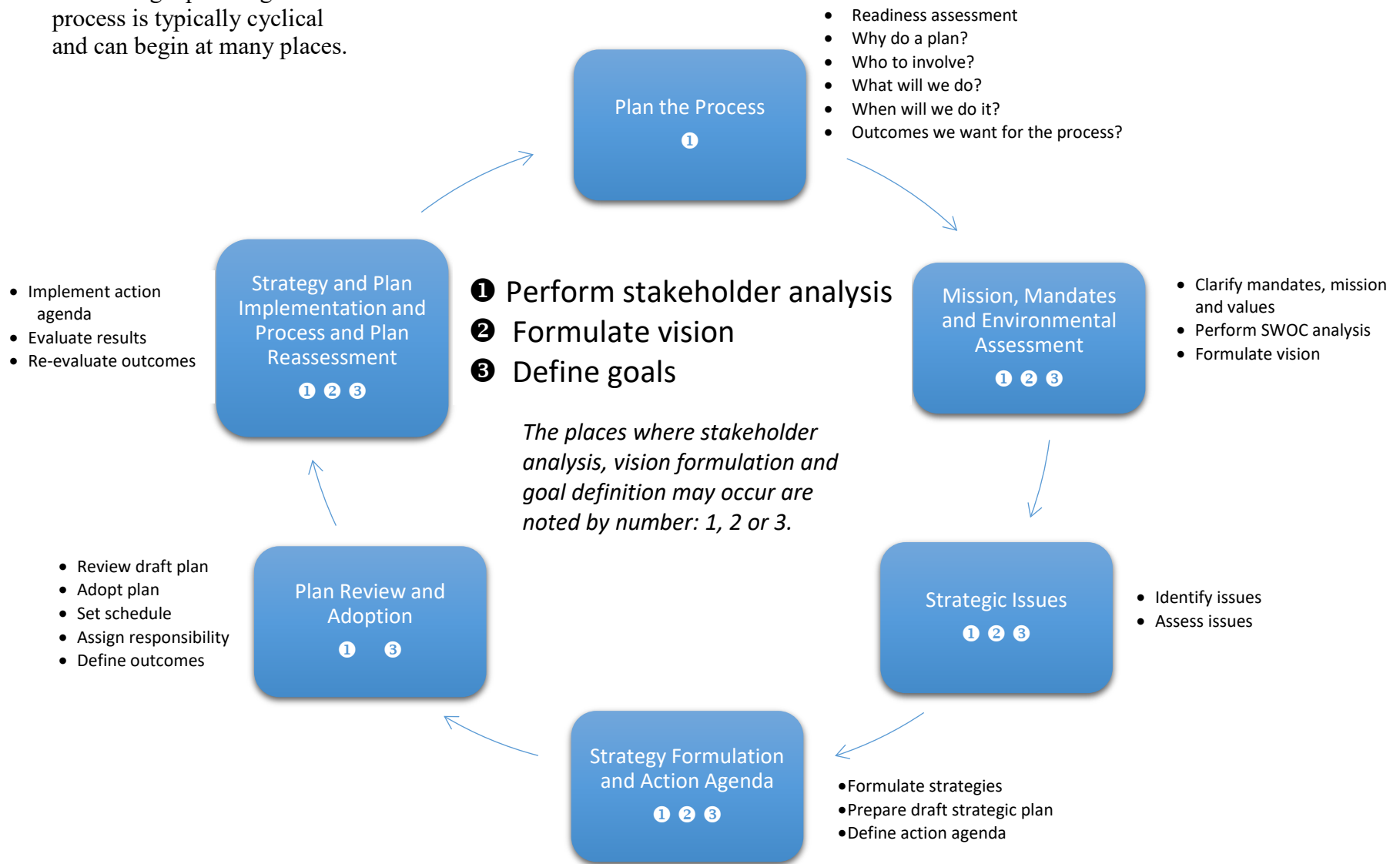
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The strategic planning process is typically cyclical and can begin at many places.



# The Strategic Planning Process Cycle

Source: Farnum Alston and The Crescent Company, (2011).