

Benefit of Strategic Planning

Most of us know that planning is a way of looking forward and deciding what we will do in the future. We plan our personal lives in detail from our youth- what we will be when we grow up, what to study in college, who and when to marry, how many children we desire, and how we'd like to spend the golden years. That's why it's so bewildering that



many organizations are not aware of the importance of planning their future. Beyond initial incorporation and attainment of 501(c)(3) status, generally grassroots nonprofit possess a "live for the moment" outlook.

Unfortunately, this is a primary reason why many nonprofits do not experience success after start-up. As a nonprofit leader, if you're a fan of getting things done you're going to have to plan.

However, priorities do not exist in a vacuum- together with your Board you'll have to evaluate the context, cost, time requirements and resources available each step of the way. To be successful in mission fulfillment, your organization will have to engage in strategic planning.

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it. It is a process that produces fundamental decisions that shape and guide the management of an organization. This process focuses on both the internal and external environments in which the organization functions.

The process requires information gathering, identification of the mandates governing the organization, clarification of the mission that drives the organization, consultation with key stakeholders of the organization, identification of the issues facing the organization in the future, the development of strategic alternatives to address those issues, a plan for implementation, and evaluation of the implementation.

Development of a clear vision of the future will then serve to motivate employees and to keep the organization moving toward achieving the goals identified in the strategic

planning process. Additionally, strategic planning can function as a team building strategy facilitating communication and participation within the organization.

Ideally, the process of strategic planning in a nonprofit will lead to the development of strategic management. In strategic management, mechanisms are in place which facilitates the ongoing monitoring of the environment to identify potential issues that the organization may face in the future. The implementation, evaluation, and reassessment of the strategic plan are part of daily management activities increasing the flexibility of the organization to respond to changes in its environment.

For both strategic planning and management to be effective, a strong commitment from the organization's leadership is necessary. Each organization needs a process sponsor to endorse and legitimize the strategic planning process, and a process champion who takes on the responsibility of making the process work.

With the support of management, strategic planning and management provide an organization flexibility to respond to a changing environment and to proactively plan its future. Strategic management, in essence, allows the road to success to be paved with good intentions. It beats the well known alternative.

Strategic planning should be used to create the roadmap that will guide an organization through the organization's landscape by capitalizing on its strengths in order to do the best job it can at delivering on its mission promises. It is an essential tool for ensuring a focused pursuit of mission.