

# The Seven Sins of Strategic Planning

Every organization starts their strategic planning process with certain expectations and hopes of what the process will achieve. ABARIS Consulting has discovered seven mistakes that if avoided, could dramatically improve your potential for achieving significant benefits from your strategic planning process.

## **1. Believing the Strategic Plan is a panacea**

A strategic plan is a management tool, pure and simple. It is a management tool that can provide a number of benefits to an organization; however, it does not unto itself solve all the organization's problems. Before you begin your strategic planning process, take some time to write down what you expect to get out of it. This will help you design the process and ensure you use your resources wisely.

## **2. Viewing the plan as the end product**

Strategy development is as much about the process you undertake to develop your strategy as it is about the actual strategy itself. Using the right process will ensure that you gain commitment to your strategy and get the appropriate information to make intelligent decisions.

## **3. Developing the plan in isolation**

To avoid groupthink and to ensure that the process tests your creativity in defining your future, it is beneficial to engage the input and views of all your key stakeholders as part of the strategy development process. This doesn't mean that all of your key stakeholders should attend the strategy development meetings, but it does mean they should all be involved in the process and have the opportunity to provide meaningful input.

## **4. Failing to gather the necessary information**

Although it is often senior management and / or the Board that drive the strategic planning process, it is important to realize that these groups alone do not retain all the critical information needed for the optimal development of a strategic plan. Many other groups, such as your staff, donors, volunteers and funders, provide a perspective and level of knowledge that is often useful in developing your strategic direction.

## **5. Developing paralysis by analysis**

Setting or assessing the future direction of an organization is never an easy job. It is built on a series of assumptions based on the best information available at the time. As such, there are often people who are uncomfortable with undertaking the process because things change so rapidly. If they do go forward with the process, they get caught up in the constant and never-ending analysis of information, looking for that one right answer. Don't fall into this trap. Document your key assumptions, understand that the plan is a management tool to guide the allocation of your organization's resources and move forward. If any of your key assumptions change, assess, take corrective action and move on.

## **6. Failing to communicate**

During the strategy development process many stakeholders within the organization become uncomfortable with what's happening and what it will mean to them. To ensure continued productivity within your organization, develop a plan to communicate the

process to your stakeholders and keep them up to date. This is especially important in those organizations that are facing a crisis or expect a significant change in direction.

## **7. Failing to implement**

Once you've completed the plan the real work is just beginning. The strategic plan is a guideline for the effective allocation of resources to help maximize the probability of achieving the goals and objectives that you have set out. If you fail to implement, you have not only wasted a considerable amount of resources, but you also start to lose credibility with your key stakeholders. Make sure that as part of your planning process you are aware of how you will implement your strategy.

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- Charities
- Associations
- Fraternal Benefit Societies
- Educational Institutions
- Government Agencies

Our consulting practice is focused in five core areas critical to the success of any non-profit organization:

- Strategic Management
- Organizational Capacity
- Governance
- Executive Recruitment
- Fundraising

Our approach is as unique as it is dynamic. Not only are we dedicated to delivering the right solution, we're also committed to developing the right process to get there. Ultimately, we're dedicated to growing great non-profits through applied knowledge, which leads to better decision making, improved stakeholder involvement and true success.

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