



Planning for Nonprofit Organizations

From Apply Now, Your Guide to Nonprofit Charitable Orgs.

A Plan is a Map to Advancing Your Mission

Your nonprofit organization has been providing service for a number of years and yet, the growth you expected to achieve has not been realized. Or, you just started a nonprofit organization, decided to incorporate, have a small board of directors and a mission, but now what? Each organization realizes it needs to become something more or different than it is today. What do you do? Develop a plan, write it down and be accountable for sticking to it.

A Strategic Plan

For new nonprofit organizations, some would argue that you should have started planning before you got this far but many organizations do not - at least not on paper. They have their hands full becoming organized and getting ready to pursue a dream. Don't worry; the process of deciding to start a nonprofit includes many considerations necessary to create a formal plan. Moving those thoughts from your head to paper is essential.

For existing nonprofit organizations, strategic planning will provide a long-term map on how to get from where you are today to where you want to be. Because it encompasses activity over several years, a strategic plan will need to be tweaked over the course of time as there are assumptions made in creating the plan that ultimately will not come to fruition.

A strategic plan should cover three to five years or so and should contain the following elements:

- Your mission statement. It is the reason you started a nonprofit organization and describes what you do.
- A vision statement. It is what you hope to become. This statement provides motivation to the board of directors, staff, volunteers and donors.
- The values upon which your organization will conduct its operations. While your mission may be noble and your vision grand, how you get there is important as it often reveals the quality of your organization.
- An assessment and description of the needs you hope to address through your nonprofit work. Defining the needs to be fulfilled or the problems to be solved helps to promote your work and to make your nonprofit attractive to donors who wish to help with fundraising.
- Your goals. In striving to meet the needs of the community or in solving problems, to what extent do you hope to accomplish your work?
- A description of where the organization stands today - an organizational assessment. To get to where you are going, you have to know where you are starting. The assessment reveals the strengths and weakness of your nonprofit organization so that you can focus on specific areas to improve.
- The strategies you will use to achieve the goals described above leading toward the vision of what the organization should become. These strategies are what you will use to achieve your goals while sticking to the values to which you aspire.

While a long-term or strategic plan is important, it must be segmented into specific, achievable pieces that can be measured for effectiveness and cost. It is easy to dream, which often is the basis for a strategic plan, while it is much harder to face reality, which is done through an annual plan,

An Annual Plan

Why a one-year plan? Things change over the course of time and a year is a reasonable period where there should not be an abundance of significant changes affecting a nonprofit organization. An annual plan is more difficult to develop because it should address specific objectives. These objectives are achieved through actions which create specific responsibility for staff and volunteers. Staff and volunteers will be measured by how well the action they take achieves objectives on the

road to accomplishing overall organizational goals.

Many strategic plans ultimately are shelved because an organization fails to adequately assign responsibility or hold staff accountable for the accomplishment of smaller actions through an annual plan. A new nonprofit organization has a better chance of sticking to a plan than an existing organization because organizational change is difficult and staff and volunteers become comfortable in the roles they have developed. Real change must start at the top with the board of directors, the executive director and senior managers. If it does not, it won't flow down to staff and volunteers.

Planning should be an inclusive process seeking input from all who are involved internally and externally with the nonprofit organization. As people are involved, they will assume a level of ownership for the plan and become more receptive to change. While change can create some fear or trepidation, it can also bring new spirit and enthusiasm for the work of the organization. People often rediscover their motivation for getting involved with the organization leading to greater satisfaction in their work.

Get started with your new plan or dust-off the one on the shelf. Ask people to become involved, give them responsibility and enjoy the revitalization of your nonprofit organization and the advancement of its mission.

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