

## **Steps in the Strategic Planning Process**

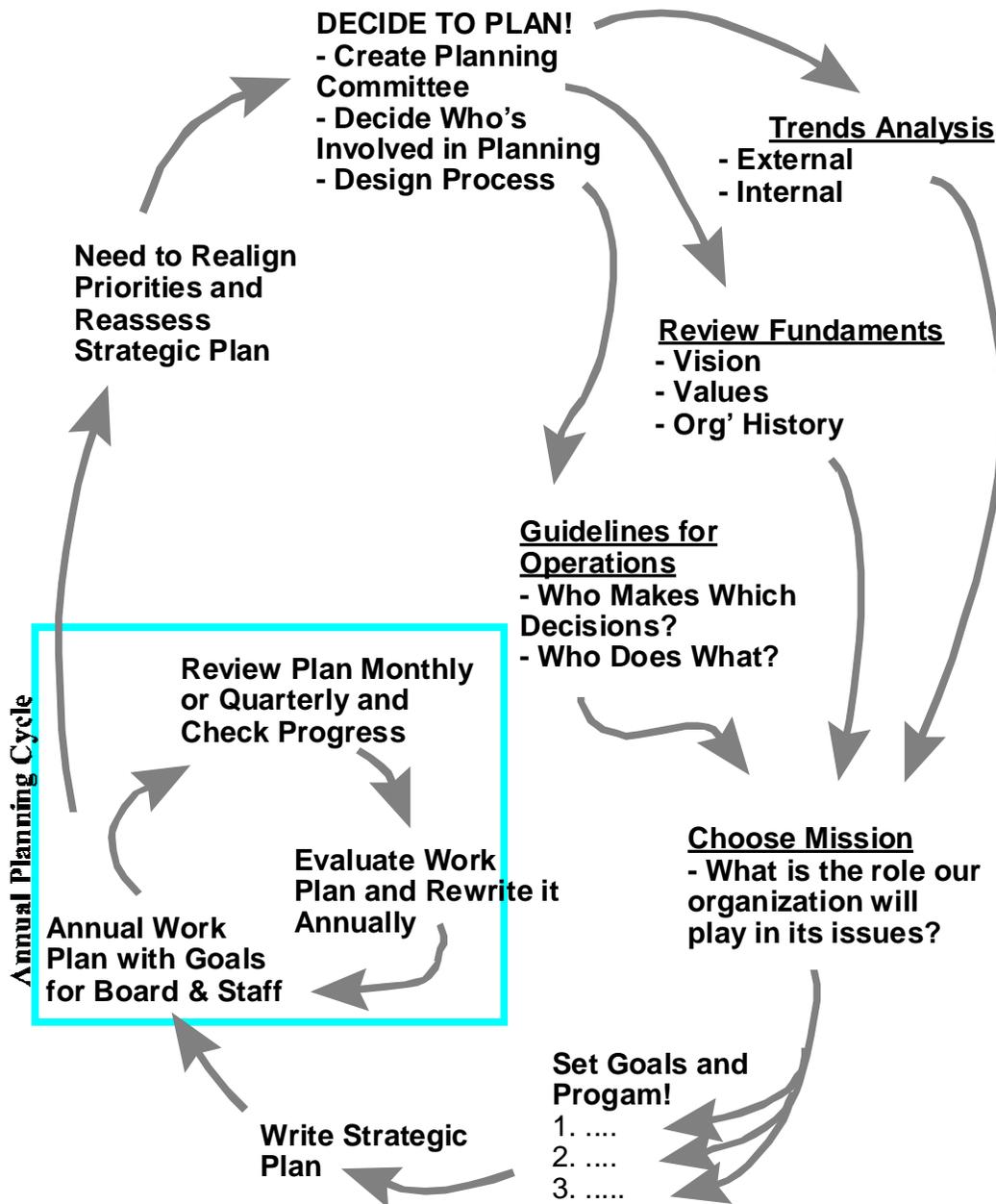
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Attached is a chart describing a cycle of strategic planning which introduces the concepts and steps an organization might take. It is a model and, like most models, it must be adapted to your situation. No organization does every step, and frequently not every step is done in the order described. Often certain steps like clarifying vision and values are revisited several times. Each group will need to choose which ones are necessary for them. A brief description of each of these steps follows, as a brief explanation of the chart.

1. **Decide to Plan:** Starting where we are C this is when board and staff begin to notice that the situation is changing rapidly, or has changed, and current ways of doing business aren't sufficient. That's when the board decides to undertake planning, selects a committee, and develops a plan for how and when they will plan.
2. **Values and Vision:** What we really care about. Why we are here. How we got here. Who we work with and for C allies, collaborators, constituency, stakeholders. How the world will be different because we work to change it.



3. **SWOT (Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)**  
Analysis: Trends that will affect our work in the next three to ten years C what are the opportunities and challenges/threats? How well prepared are we? What are the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses?
4. **Strategic Issues:** What are the key issues we are dealing with C and how can they be translated into critical questions that we can answer? Develop alternative scenarios for moving into the future.
5. **Guidelines:** What are the principles that guide us? What criteria will we use to make choices? Who can make what kinds of decisions, when, with what consultation? What is the scope of action that board and staff and volunteers each enjoy and are responsible for?
6. **Programs:** Based on the above steps, establish overall program areas and goals, specific objectives and activities. This includes external goals, such as educating school children about groundwater by conducting workshops in 25% of the sixth-grade classes over three years. It also includes internal goals, such as a human resources plan for board and staff development, or stabilizing our finances through a diversified funding base with 10% of income from fees, 30% from foundations and 60% from small and major donors in three years. These are just examples.
7. **Implementation:** Annual work plan with allocation of people and financial resources for all program and internal goals. This can be very specific for the first year and more general for years two and three. Then just do it.



8. Evaluation: Planning and carrying out a monitoring and feedback process that lets us figure out what's working well and where we need to improve. This is the key part of strategic planning C it-s what makes it a living, breathing way for all involved in the organization to continue to learn from action, to discuss options, and to make better decisions. Once the planning system has been established, this planning cycle is repeated on an annual or biannual basis, with steps along the way.



## TIMING OF PLANNING

The process of taking an organization through the strategic planning cycle for the first time can take different amounts of time depending on the situation. There are two time-related concerns: one is how long does the whole deal take; the other is how do we manage the time we spend on planning. To illustrate what this might mean, here are some options. Each assumes work will be done in between meetings by staff, board committees, and volunteers:

1. Do some work at each board meeting for a year and a half.
2. The Board and staff set aside a day for a planning retreat three times at intervals over the course of a year.
3. Board and staff committees develop a lot of the background material over three to six months and the entire plan is developed at a three-day retreat.

## LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

Who does what parts of the plan? Basically there are several different kinds of players C the board planning committee, the full board, the staff, the membership, and external consultants who assist the planning process.

Planning is usually supported by an outside consultant, which frees the organizational members to concentrate on the research, discussion and decision making. Depending on the membership and volunteer structure, these folks may be involved at key points C such as chapters identifying key issues or a membership survey. Also, allies who are external to the organization such as funders, clients, the broader constituency, or political players C are consulted frequently.



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The core work is usually directed by staff and board, however. Some options for participation include the following:

1. The staff does all the background development and thinking & the board only makes final decisions. This usually happens in larger staff-driven organizations.
2. The board does it all, with occasional input from staff. Usually happens in organizations with few staff, or highly engaged and active board members. Sometimes preferred by highly political organizations, such as coalitions.
3. Staff and board interact, but mainly it's driven by the staff & the board makes critical decisions along the way.
4. The board is the main driving force, but the process is interactive with all elements of the organization and is supported by the staff.

Ultimately the full board makes the final decisions on the plan & they are responsible for the organization's future