Martin & Downs

Ten reasons strategic plans fail
By Alice Martin, RCE

Strategic plans often don't get off the shelf and do nothing but create dust. Or they quickly become irrelevant. There are many reasons that a plan could fail, but the most common are:

1. **A non-representative planning group.** Many associations have the Board of Directors solely involved in planning, which can often exclude perspectives from the member on the street or other constituencies. Consider appointing a group that represents a cross section of the membership along with some members of the Board, including incoming leaders.
2. **Lack of member input.** Boards of Directors often think they know what members want and need, but sometimes their perspective may be too narrow. Look for ways to get member feedback – from electronic surveys to informal one-on-one interviews.
3. **Out of sync with trends.** If planners don't look at what's happening around them – both in the real estate and association worlds – and where things seem to be moving, the association will likely not be ready to provide the tools members need to be successful in the future. This helps planners play a serious "what-if" game as they prepare for some uncertainty.
4. **Lack of buy-in.** 1, 2, and 3 above could all lead to disenfranchisement of the membership. If you don't listen to them and don't look at the external environment, relevance becomes a distant memory.
5. **Too many goals.** Some plans are overwhelming! There can be no way all of the goals and objectives can be met in a 3 year cycle and most staff and volunteer leaders' eyes will cross just looking at a multi-page plan that is too ambitious. This can be so daunting that the plan simply gets shelved.
6. **No assignments. No accountability.** This is a huge problem. If objectives aren't assigned to the appropriate groups or individuals, no one is responsible and no one follows up. An annual action plan for every program related to the plan's objectives should be developed – to include what, who, when, and how much, if there's a related budget.
7. **Lack of resources**. Plans look great and include strategies for the future, but will need considerable financial and human resources, both of which the association doesn't plan for. This will most likely mean those goals won't be reached.
8. **No alignment with the budget.** Most associations have good plans in place to move their associations forward but have failed to see the importance of having their budgets tied to the plan – in fact, sometimes it's the other way around. Your plan should be the leader in determining what to budget and where each item falls on the priority pecking list. If your plan is not prioritized or its objectives haven't been assigned, this should be your first step. Then, develop budgets for anything that is planned to happen in the next budget year.
9. **No measurements.** If those groups assigned objectives don't develop measurements that will clearly show goals are met, it's hard to determine if they have. It can be a challenge in the non-profit world to come up with measurements that aren't "quantity-related" but it can be done and must be done.
10. **No follow up.** Even with assignments and measurements, if the Board of Directors isn't on top of the plan's progress, it could easily fade away into "who cares land?" The Board should be tracking the progress of the plan continuously and should evaluate the overall progress of the plan annually, tweaking it as necessary to move into the next budget year.

Want to schedule a planning session?

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