

INITIATE and agree on a strategic planning process and clarify organizational mandates

INITIATE and agree on a strategic planning process

The initial agreement is one of the most important steps in the strategic process. The purpose of this step is to develop an initial agreement among the key decision makers and, perhaps, external stakeholders about whether the organization's pursuit of strategic planning is worthwhile. If the consensus is that strategic planning is worthwhile, the next step would be to determine the tasks necessary to plan for such an effort and authorize proponents of the plan to move forward.

This is the time to build commitment toward developing an effective strategic plan and process. Identify individuals and groups necessary to move the process forward. Decision-makers must address the following questions about the strategic planning process design:

- Who owns the plan?
- What is the purpose of the strategic plan?
- Will the strategic planning process adopted fit the organization's needs?
- Who will manage the strategic planning process?
- Will the organization use a schedule?

Success is more likely with a commitment of resources and a well-designed strategic planning process.

DESIRED outcomes

- Agreements on:
 - The value of strategic planning
 - The scope of the plan
 - Will the plan involve the entire organization or one or more divisions?
Recognize the scope of the project from the start, as it will affect the cost, time commitment and resources allocated to the project.
 - Who will be involved in the plan?
 - The actual strategic planning process
 - The schedule, if applicable. Give adequate time to devote to the project.
- Strategic planning committee that manages the day-to-day strategic planning activities

- Resource commitments

CLARIFY organizational mandates

The next step is to clarify the nature and meaning of necessary organizational mandates, which can be either formal or informal. Formal mandates are required and include policies; federal, state and local laws; administrative codes and regulations. Election results and key stakeholders' expectations are examples of informal mandates.

Planners need to consider that formal and informal mandates not only constrain their efforts to realize their organization's strategic goals, but also provide the means to achieve those goals. It is important that an organization have a clear understanding of its current mandates, as well as their implications for future actions.

Many organizations assume that they are more constrained by mandates than they actually are. Some mandates may provide a wider range of options than organizational members assume because they have always narrowly interpreted the mandates. While that interpretation of the mandates may have served their organization well at one time, new challenges and opportunities may require another interpretation or a change in the mandates. In other instances, organizations may be operating under outdated mandates that no longer serve a purpose to the public. Organizations must take the time to distinguish which mandates are appropriate and which are out-of-date.

Another error that organizations make is to emphasize one aspect of a mandate over another. For example, an organization may have both a regulatory and service delivery role. If the administration has viewed the organization as regulatory, most of its funding and resources have gone towards performing that role. A review of the mandate may reveal that it was not necessary that the regulatory role dominates its service delivery role and that each creates equal value to the organization and its clients.

DESIRED outcomes

- List of an organization's formal and informal mandates
- Clarification of what is required by the mandates and what is not
- Identification of mandates that have outlived their time and usefulness

For assistance with organizational mandates, see Background for Group Discussion of Mandates.