



STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning is a systematic process through which a club or Local Swim Committee (LSC) agrees on-and builds commitment among key stake holders to priorities which are essential to its mission and responsive to the operating environment.

- Strategic Choosing how to respond to an ever-changing environment.
- Systematic Using a focused and productive process.
- Priorities Making decisions about ends and means, for the short and the long terms.
- Commitment Engaging key stakeholders in building a consensus.

From Michael Allison and Jude Kaye, Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide and Workbook (John Wiley & Sons, 1997).

What are the benefits of planning?

- An opportunity to engage in serious examination of and reflection on the meaning of a club's success and effectiveness.
- A chance to build higher levels of understanding and commitment to the work of the club among staff and board.
- Constructive moment to engage in internal evaluation and to learn about the external environment.
- Improved decision-making.
- The enhanced club confidence that comes from managing by intention and design, rather than by emergency.

Success Factors	Potential Obstacles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment from the board's leaders and from the senior staff. • A realistic plan for planning. • A timetable that allows for adequate information gathering, reflection and discussion, but does not drag the process out beyond the attention span of board and staff. • A reasonable commitment of human and financial resources, given the other demands on people's time and the club's budget. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board member who are jaded or cynical about planning. • A staff leader with a very strong and personal vision. • A club facing a crisis.

Why is planning a board responsibility?

- Stewardship
Boards have the ultimate responsibility for the well-being of the club. Planning is one of a number of ways that boards help to provide both leadership and care for an club. It is also an important platform for increasing the board's role in fund raising. An inclusive planning process and a good plan help board members make a strong case with funders.
- Objectivity
Although board members often need to learn a lot about an club before serious planning takes place, they do have the capacity to be more objective than staff about the basic inquiries of a planning process: what are the club's strengths and weakness, what are the opportunities and threats that face it.
- Capacity
Board member often have experience of strategic planning from other settings.

The Board's Role in Strategic Planning

- Plan for planning.
- Revisiting or restating vision, mission, and values. (This is also a good point in the process to develop an understanding of the history, evolution, and achievements of the club).
- Framing initial strategic issues or goals.
- Review and approval of the plan.

Other Players in Planning

Some boards have a limited appetite for planning; all boards have a limited amount of time. Balancing board and staff participation will depend on a number of factors:

- How knowledgeable and experienced is the board?
It may require too much time on both the part of board and staff to make the board sufficiently familiar, with programs and the operating environment to make the involvement in the initial stages of plan development very useful. It may make sense for the staff to pull together essential elements of the plan for board reaction, discussion, and, after revision, approval.
- How large and experienced is the staff?
The full board of a club with a strong professional staff and well-established, successful programs is often willing to participate in the planning process at a few significant junctures. It often delegates much of the process to a handful of board members working closely with senior staff.

While planning must involve both board and staff, it is usually either staff-driven or participatory:

- **Staff-Driven**
In a staff-driven planning process, principal energy and control of the process is provided by the head coach and other coaches, working with a few key board members. They develop the plan and the budget, and then present them to the rest of the board for review and approval. The entire process can be completed within several weeks if intensive time is allocated.
- **Participatory**
In a participatory process, wide input is sought through a process in which staff and board take several months to determine resources requirements and to conduct a performance analysis, needs assessment, and market evaluation before coming together as a complete or representative group in a retreat or other setting. The entire process can take several months (or as long as a year for first-time strategic plans).

Strategic plans comes in all shapes and sizes, and it is important for the board and staff to decide what kind of planning best suits its tradition, culture, time constraints, attitude about planning, sense of urgency, and knowledge of the process. The following describes the basic elements of most planning endeavors:

Who are we?

1. Create or affirm a club vision and mission.

Where are we now?

Analyze the current plan (if one exists) and the program, financial, and administrative performance of the club.

3. Assess and document the community needs to which the club is responding.
4. Assess constraints, opportunities, resources, and the environment -factors that will affect the club and influence planning.

Where do we want to go?

5. Prepare preliminary goals and objectives, based on the information gathered and assessed in steps 1-4. If necessary, revisit and reaffirm the vision and mission in light of new information.
6. Review and validate the goals and objectives.

How will we get there?

7. Develop a financial plan and budget to support the validated goals and objectives.
8. Develop an action plan for each objective.
9. Prepare comprehensive plan for review, approval, and implementation.

How are we doing?

10. Evaluate progress and update the plan on a regular basis.

PLANNING ACTIVITIES WITH THE BOARD

Strategic planning will take place in a variety of different venues and formats within a club's structure. Those involved with leading and guiding the process may include the board president, a committee chair, the head coach, and/or an independent consultant. The following exercises and worksheets are designed to generate discussion and material that will be further researched and developed as part of a final strategic plan.

- Quick Study Board Self-Assessment (see below) asks a board to evaluate its current involvement in strategic planning. It is especially useful when just beginning to work with a new board, for head coach's and board chairs who are uncertain about the board's interest in planning, and for clubs whose vision may have become blurred.
- Creating a Shared Mission. In order to create a shared mission and vision for the club, board members must first step back to learn and discuss what their fellow board members see as the club's mission. [How to Write a Vision and Mission Statement](#) can be distributed at the beginning of a discussion about the club's mission.
- Often, boards are often hesitant to jump into strategic planning. To help them realize that they do not necessarily need to start the process with a great deal of research and detail, start a board meeting or retreat with the list of 20 Questions (see below) that surfaces many aspects and ideas that will feed into a strategic plan.
- SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats)-see below
- Contents of a Strategic Plan (see below)

QUICK STUDY BOARD SELF-ASSESSMENT

One of the major contributions that a board can make to a club is to consider what the club needs to accomplish over the next three to five years, and to recommend action to reach those goals.

Given the amount of time that the staff has to concentrate on day-to-day operations, the board can much more easily focus on the future.

At least every three to five years, the board should engage in a formal planning process to better understand the fluctuating environment in which the club is operating, and to then decide what changes it should make to function more effectively in that environment.

How satisfied are you that: ("4" being highest)	1	2	3	4	Not Sure
The board focuses much of its attention on long-term, significant policy issues rather than short-term administrative matters?					
The board has a strategic vision of how the club should be evolving over the next three to five years?					
The board periodically engages in a strategic planning process that helps it consider how the club should meet new opportunities and challenges?					

20 QUESTIONS

1. Do we need to exist?
2. If so, why?
3. What is our image?
4. What would we like our image to be?
5. What impact have we had?
6. What impact would we like to have?
7. Whom do we serve?
8. What are the needs of our constituents?
9. What do we do?
10. What programs are going to be obsolete?
11. What programs are we going to need to add?
12. How well do we discontinue programs?
13. What are our strengths?
14. What are our weaknesses?
15. What are the threats facing us?
16. What are our opportunities?
17. What trends are taking place that will affect us?
18. Who is our competition?
19. What is our strategic advantage?
20. What is the vision for the group?

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

INTERNAL FORCES		EXTERNAL FORCES	
Internal Competencies: financial, managerial, functional, and club capabilities: reputation & history		External Conditions and Trends: economic, political and legal, social, & community	
Strengths		Opportunities	
1.		1.	
2.		2.	
3.		3.	
4.		4.	
5.		5.	
Weaknesses		Threats	
1.		1.	
2.		2.	
3.		3.	
4.		4.	
5.		5.	

CONTENT OF A STRATEGIC PLAN

Elements of a strategic plan include:

- Statement of mission and purpose (reaffirmation or revision)
- Statistics, trends and other research data
- Needs of current programs and services (feedback from club can be helpful)
- Need for new programs and services (again-feedback from club can be helpful)
- Swimmer development and retention strategies
- Staffing, both current and future needs
- Board of Directors (If the club has a board, review its size, methods of recruitment, board performance, meetings, committee structure, roles)
- Financial projections (dues, expenses, fundraising, reserves)
- Fundraising goals and strategies
- Public education and relations strategies

Strategic planning is a future-oriented endeavor, rather than a problem-solving activity. Problem solving is a "now" oriented approach that merely alleviates current crises. Strategic planning relies on problem-solving tools, but looks beyond the present to the club's future goals. The following key pieces help shape the development and implementation of a strategic plan:

Philosophical	•Vision	Describes the club's impact in the future.
	•Mission	Philosophical expression of the club, plus brief summary of what the club does.
Strategic	•Goals	Desired accomplishments (programmatic, administrative, developmental, and otherwise).
Tactical	•Objectives	Specific Measurable Attainable Results-Oriented Time-Determined
	•Action Steps	Task Timeline Point Person

Taken from the "Club Leadership Development Notebook" a publication from *BoardSource* created specifically for USA Swimming. For more information about *BoardSource* write to 1828 L Street NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20036-5114. Telephone (202) 452-6262. Fax: (202) 452-6299, email: mail@boardsource.org, website: <http://www.boardsource.org/>. Copyright 2000. Used with permission.