

2003

Case study of strategic planning for small nonprofits

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Department of Hospitality and Service Management
Graduate Studies

M.S. Service Management
Presentation of Thesis/Project Findings

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Title of Research: CASE STUDY of STRATEGIC PLANNING
for SMALL NONPROFITS

Specific Recommendations: (use other side if necessary)

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CASE STUDY OF STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR SMALL NONPROFITS

By

Peter F. Roland, Jr.

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the School of Hospitality and Service Management
at the
Rochester Institute of Technology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

August, 2003

Abstract

The Lake Placid/North Elba Historical Society suffers from the absence of planning processes that can address the long-term needs of the organization. As a result the resources of the Society are being underutilized. At present the only medium for the planning function is the monthly Board meeting, which must also address operational issues. Both new and old members of the Board have ideas regarding what they see as the past, present and future mission of the Museum and the Society. A forum or medium does not currently exist which would provide an opportunity for members of the Board and all stakeholders to discuss this mission and share their visions of what the Society should be. The purpose of the study is to examine strategic planning processes used by two historical societies serving small communities utilizing a case study design. By examining the planning efforts of these organizations, best practices that indicate the likelihood of success or failure will be described. The leaders of the study organizations reported positive outcomes as a result of undertaking a strategic planning process. The level of success in developing and implementing a plan varied, but the process of developing a strategic plan was beneficial for both organizations. Upon completion of the study it will be determined if this process would be an appropriate way to plan for the future of the Lake Placid/North Elba Historical Society. If it appears there would be a high likelihood of success a strategic planning process for the Society could be initiated. This process would provide a forum whereby each member of the Board and all stakeholders will have the opportunity to share their visions of what the Society should be. It would synthesize these visions and provide a roadmap for achieving the goals, objectives and strategies outlined in the plan. In a larger context, it may perpetuate and enhance the primary function of the organization: to record and interpret the history of the community it serves.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank Anne Ackerson, of the Museum Association of New York. Ms. Ackerson's planning materials and contacts with organizations she has consulted in strategic planning processes were invaluable in conducting the research necessary for this case study. I am also indebted to Mary Lou Willits, Executive Director of the Slate Valley Museum and Jean Guthrie, President of the Big Springs Historical Society. Their generosity of time and information offered tremendous insight into the planning processes undertaken by their organizations. Elizabeth Clarke, AICP, of Wallace, Roberts and Todd provided resources and perspectives on community planning. I would also like to thank Dr. James Jacobs and Dr. James Myers of the RIT faculty for their insights and assistance. They taught me the importance of envisioning a future, and how to make that future a reality.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As the world of business is constantly changing, often at an accelerating pace, so too is the world of nonprofit management. Volunteers in many organizations no longer have generous amounts of time to give to support their causes, and accelerated growth in many nonprofit sectors has also ended (Smith, Bucklin & Associates, 2000). Increased competition for membership, audiences and funding has also significantly changed the environment in which nonprofits operate.

Accordingly, these trends have increased the challenges faced by volunteer leaders of nonprofit organizations. Indeed, "the obligations of board members are considerable- they extend well beyond the basic expectations of attending meetings, participating in fund-raising initiatives, and making monetary contributions" (Ingram, 1999, p.29). To ensure that an organization's mission is fulfilled, they must provide effective leadership and governance. "To accomplish this, leaders must work to embrace new management practices that reshape organizations to remain competitive. In addition, they must build value within their organizations to satisfy the increasing needs of members, often with resources that are truly limited" (Smith, Bucklin & Associates, 2000, p.xv).

The Lake Placid/North Elba Historical Society (the Society) is a membership organization created in 1948 for the purpose of documenting the history of the Village of Lake Placid and the Town of North Elba, the town in which Lake Placid is located. In 1967 two patrons of the Society purchased the Train Station from the Penn Central Railroad Corporation, which had ceased both passenger and freight operations into Lake Placid. The Station was given to the Society in order to provide a permanent home for the organization as well as to create a museum documenting the history of Lake Placid and North Elba. The Society currently has approximately 250 members and is governed by a fifteen member Board of Trustees. It serves a seasonal and year round population of approximately 10,000 people.

The Society is currently undergoing a change in the composition of the Board, with the addition of new Trustees following the retirement of Board members that have served the organization for a number of years. New Board members bring different ideas and interpretations of the mission of the Society, and these must be reconciled with the past and existing activities of the organization. This work must take place in the rapidly changing environment noted previously.

Strategic planning may be defined as “a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it” (Bryson, 1995, p.10). Stated another way, “strategic planning is developing a shared vision of your nonprofit’s future, then determining the best way to make this vision occur” (Barry, 2001, p.6). In the business world, strategic planning has been employed as a standard part of management practice and thinking for the past 40 years. This has become standard practice for large numbers of public and nonprofit organizations only in the last fifteen to twenty years. (Bryson, 1995)

Strategic planning can be utilized not only to evaluate the current mission and activities of an organization, but also to envision a future course for that organization. Stated simply, it not only is “what our business is, but what it should be” (Drucker, 1990, p. 176). Strategic planning can help facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, foster wise and reasonably analytic decision making, and promote successful implementation. (Bryson, 1995)

As the Society moves forward in the sixth decade of its existence it must continually reexamine the service it has provided to its members and the community in the past, and how this may be enhanced in the future. In the dynamic and challenging environment faced by both businesses and nonprofits the continued relevance and vitality of any organization is not guaranteed. The patronage and confidence of the stakeholders of any organization must be earned and maintained in order to assure its continued existence. It is widely recognized that strategic planning is a means of identifying not only what an organization does and for whom, but what it is capable of doing in the future. Equally

important, strategic *thinking and acting* are more important than any particular approach to strategic planning. (Bryson, 1995)

The Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society is at a crossroads. A number of historical societies in New York State have utilized different approaches to strategic planning in order to chart their future course. By analyzing the value of strategic planning for historical societies, key factors for the success or failure of other organization's efforts will be identified that will inform the actions of the Society's Board as they consider undertaking this process.

In a larger context, it is hoped that a study and analysis of the value of strategic planning for Historical Societies will perpetuate and enhance the primary function of these organizations: to record and interpret the history of the communities that they serve.

"If you don't know where you are heading, you are likely to end up somewhere else".

Yogi Berra

Statement of the Problem

“At some point in the life cycle of virtually every organization, its ability to succeed in spite of itself runs out.”

Richard Brien

The Lake Placid/North Elba Historical Society suffers from the absence of planning processes that can address the long-term needs of the organization. As a result the resources of the Society are being underutilized.

The Board of Trustees is charged with overseeing the operations of the Society as well as planning for the future. They address operations through an existing committee structure, with the assistance of a part-time Executive Director. The Board has recently been expanded to fifteen members from twelve, in an effort to bring on new Trustees while not displacing long-term members who wish to continue to serve.

At present the only medium for the planning function is the monthly Board meeting, which must also address operational issues. Both new and old members of the Board have ideas regarding what they see as the past, present and future mission of the Museum and the Society. A forum or medium does not currently exist which would provide an opportunity for members of the Board and all stakeholders to discuss this mission and share their visions of what the Society should be.

The Board is faced with an unstable physical plant, in particular requiring replacement of a slate roof that threatens the integrity of the Museum building. No longer-term program for the stabilization and possible improvement of the building and space surrounding it is in place.

Other problem areas include chronic budget deficits, a decline in membership, low public visibility, outdated exhibits, deterioration of existing programs and lack of new programs for the public. In particular the necessity of dealing with short term problems-

i.e. “putting out fires” –has hindered the ability of the Board to address the long term needs of the organization.

The Society is not without its strengths. In general the aims of the Historical Society have broad acceptance in the community. The Society also is financially sound by way of a small endowment, which has allowed the organization to operate at a loss in the past while remaining solvent. While the deficit spending cannot go on indefinitely these funds can provide a cushion while means of greater financial stability are sought.

Opportunities exist in part because there are few other organizations competing for the attention or funding of the public in performing the historical interpretation function in the area. The rail line has been recently redeveloped by The Adirondack Rail Preservation Society (ARPS) as a scenic railroad attraction for tourists and residents. This has increased the visibility of and traffic through the museum as a result of its operations. In addition use of the rail line for other types of recreation (cross country skiing, hiking, mountain biking) increases the likelihood of the award of grant monies through the New York State Department of Transportation.

The significance of the problem is that the long-term viability of the Society is not assured. In particular, the strengths and opportunities that are present are not being leveraged to achieve maximum attainment of the current mission of the Society. Formal consideration is not being given to how the Society can potentially expand its present purpose and discover new ways to serve its members and the community at large in the future. In an increasingly competitive environment, those organizations that serve their communities the best will survive and prosper.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine strategic planning processes used by historical societies serving small communities in New York State utilizing a case study design. Two different organizations have been selected that are similar in size and function to the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society. (See appendix A for a comparison of these organizations in terms of staffing and volunteers, budget, functional areas, and governance).

The success of a strategic planning initiative is not a given. While there are clearly identifiable benefits to organizations that undertake a strategic planning process, there are limitations to the process and situations where this process should not be undertaken. These scenarios will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.

By studying the planning efforts of these organizations, best practices which indicate the likelihood of success or failure for this process will be described. Upon completion of the study it will be determined if this process would be an appropriate way to plan for the future of the Lake Placid/North Elba Historical Society. If it appears there would be a high likelihood of success a strategic planning process for the Society could be initiated. This process would provide a forum whereby each member of the Board and all stakeholders will have the opportunity to share their visions of what the Society should be. It would synthesize these visions and provide a roadmap for achieving the goals, objectives and strategies outlined in the plan.

An assessment tool will also be created that may be used by other Historical Societies or similar organizations serving small communities. Since this process requires a substantial commitment of time and resources for organizations of this nature and size an assessment of key determinants of success and failure may be helpful in decisions regarding future planning efforts.

Major Question, and Subquestions

What was the value of a strategic planning process for the Slate Valley Museum and Big Springs Historical Society?

What was the impetus for the planning process? Are there commonalities between their needs and those of the Lake Placid/North Elba Historical Society?

What were the areas of focus?

Internal Environment:

Mission/Vision Statement

Governance; i.e. Board and Committee structure

Human Resources: Paid and volunteer staff

Administrative Processes

Finance, including size of budget and types of funding

Membership: profile of members and marketing to new members

Exhibits

Publications

Programs

External Environment

Stakeholders and General Public

Other local museums: content and programs

Potential Funding Sources

What types of processes were used? Costs associated with these?

How was the planning process executed? Key factors for success?

What were the outcomes of the planning process? Strategic recommendations?

What was the success of implementation of plans produced?

Factors in this success?

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

The case studies will be limited to two organizations in New York State that are members of the Upstate History Alliance. Compared to the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society, the organizations selected are of similar size and perform similar functions in their communities. The Slate Valley Museum is larger than the Society, while the Big Springs Historical Society is smaller (See Appendix A for comparisons). These two organizations were selected because they represent a meaningful continuum between an organization with a number of paid staff and an all-volunteer organization with a minimum of paid staff.

The purpose in limiting the study to organizations within New York State is that they operate in similar environments relating to state and local funding of their activities.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the assumption that some attributes and activities of organizations undergoing a planning process are transferable to other organizations. Although all organizations are unique it is hoped that a study based on different planning experiences can be used by the Society and other organizations.

Both of the organizations studied undertook planning processes facilitated by Anne Ackerson, a consultant associated with the Museum Association of New York.

Ms. Ackerson provided a wealth of information to the researcher, as well as contacts necessary to arrange interviews with the leadership of the study organizations. The study is limited by the fact that Ms. Ackerson was the consultant in each of the processes that will be analyzed. However, the processes and outcomes for the organizations were not identical.

The processes used by these organizations will also be reviewed in comparison to existing literature and theory on strategic planning, thereby establishing a general framework for the study.

Significance and Consequences of the Study

As previously discussed in the Introduction, the world of nonprofits and public organizations is changing at a rapid pace. In order to stay in existence and remain competitive these organizations must constantly focus on the nature of their organizations and how they serve their communities.

While the practice of strategic planning has been generally accepted in business for a number of years, its application for public and nonprofit organizations is a more recent phenomenon. More importantly, both the literature and practical experience relating to the strategic planning process suggest that it may not be appropriate for all organizations.

By examining planning theory as well as the experience of two similar organizations, it will be determined if this process is suitable for the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical

Society. If there are limitations, these can be identified and alternate methods of planning can be assessed. If a decision is made to move forward with a strategic planning process, best practices and outcomes will be identified that may inform and guide the process.

The study may also provide a framework for other organizations to assess the value of strategic planning as it may apply to their particular situation. Change is inevitable and desirable for any organization, profit or nonprofit, and a method for deciding how to deal with change within the context of an organization's environment and available resources could be a valuable addition to the intellectual capital of any organization.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature and Applications

The literature pertaining to strategic planning for nonprofit and public organizations offers an abundance of both planning theory and practical applications. To provide a framework for evaluating the subject organizations the study has utilized John Bryson's *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, which provides an exhaustive treatment of what he calls the "Strategy Change Cycle" for organizations. Bryan Barry's *Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations* provides a more application-oriented presentation of considerations and activities involved in the process. The study has also relied extensively on materials provided by Anne Ackerson, a consultant associated with the Museum Association of New York that has done extensive planning work with a number of organizations. A brief summary of the approaches utilized by each will provide a framework for analyzing the efforts of the two study organizations and their results.

Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations

Bryson (1995) identifies a number of benefits likely to result from strategic planning:

- Promotion of strategic thought and action.
- Improved decision making, by focusing on crucial issues and challenges.
- Enhanced organizational responsiveness and improved performance-
"strategic thinking *and* acting are what count, not thinking alone".
- Direct benefits to the organization's people, through better definition of roles and responsibilities and improved teamwork. (p. 7)

Strategic planning may not always be the best course of action. Bryson also identifies three distinct situations in which undertaking this process may not be advisable:

It “may not be the best first step for an organization whose roof has fallen”

This could relate to a financial situation or a need to fill an important leadership position.

The organization lacks the skills, resources, or commitment by key decision makers to produce a good plan. He calls this “the paradox of strategic planning”: it is most needed where it is least likely to work and least needed where it is most likely to work”

If implementation of a strategic plan is extremely unlikely; “the organizational equivalent of a New Years resolution” (p. 8)

The basis for Bryson’s approach is “The Strategy Change Cycle”. A brief explanation of the steps in this process is as follows:

Initiate and agree upon a strategic planning process. This is an agreement among key internal leaders about the overall strategic planning effort and steps that will be taken. It represents a “plan to plan” (Steiner, 1979). This is important because the process is “deliberately disruptive”, in that it is designed to challenge the status quo. “Only strong sponsors and champions, a supportive coalition, and a clear view of the potential benefits can make it succeed” (Bryson, 1995, p. 63).

Clarifying organizational mandates and mission. These are the mandates, mission and values which “provide the social justification for an organization’s existence” (Bryson, 1995, p. 65). These may be *formal*, such as those dictated by a Charter or Articles of Incorporation, or *informal*, such as expectations of key stakeholders. The latter is a result of a stakeholder analysis, in which the expectations of all stakeholders both inside and outside the organization are considered. The mission “clarifies an organization’s

purpose, or *why* it should be doing what it does; vision clarifies *what* the organization should look like and *how* it should behave as it fulfills its mission”

(Bryson, 1995, p. 67). Mandates are imposed from the outside; these are “the musts”

Mission is developed from inside; it identifies an organization’s purpose.

Assessing the Environment to Identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Strengths and weaknesses are typically *internal* to an organization, opportunities and threats typically exist *outside* the organization. Effective strategy links inside and outside factors, by taking advantage of strengths and opportunities while minimizing weaknesses and threats. This approach may also identify what the organization’s key “success factors” are (Jenster, 1987; Leidecker and Bruno, 1984; Mintzberg, 1994b) that allow it to succeed in the external environment. The process may also be extended to clarify the organization’s “distinctive competencies” (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). Simply stated this is what you are good at internally that allows you to perform well. Perhaps the most important benefit of this step is that it prepares the organization for the next step in which they identify “key strategic issues stemming from the convergence of its mandates, mission, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats” (Bryson, 1995, p. 86).

Identifying Strategic Issues Facing the Organization. Bryson (1995) defines a strategic issue as “a fundamental policy question or challenge affecting an organization’s mandates, mission, and values; product or service level and mix; clients, users, or payers; or costs, financing, structure, or management” (p. 104). The organization’s culture will,

in part, determine which issues are put on the agenda and which receive serious consideration in the next step, Strategy Formulation and Development. It is possible that the organization's culture "may itself become a strategic issue if the culture blinds the organization to important issues and possibilities for action" (p. 104). This step focuses attention on what is truly important, and directs attention to *issues, not answers*. This process "usually creates the kind of useful tension that is necessary to prompt organizational change" (p. 111), while also giving clues about how to resolve the issues that are identified. This is the point at which the strategic planning process "gets real" to the participants, and where the prospect of real change appears for the organization. Bryson notes that some decision makers may wish to terminate the process at this point; however, "if after completing this step the organization's key decision makers decide to push on, a final very important benefit will be gained: the organization's character will be strengthened" (p. 105).

Formulating and Adopting Strategies and Plans to Manage the Issues. It is noted that single purpose organizations, particularly small ones, may merge this step with the previous one. A strategy is "a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, actions, decisions, and/or resource allocations that defines what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (Bryson, 1995, p. 130). The strategy is therefore an "extension of an organization's mission, forming a bridge between the organization and its environment" (p. 130). Strategies can vary by level, from grand strategies for the organization as a whole to functional strategies relating to different activities within and outside the organization. They may also be either long-term or short-term. The process by which

development of strategies can take place may vary between organizations, and a number of different processes may be used. Again, Bryson emphasizes that “strategic thinking and acting are what is important, not any particular approach to strategy formulation or even the preparation of a formal strategic plan” (p. 22). The most important consideration is the creation of strategies and a plan that will be adopted and implemented by the organization.

Establishing an Effective Organizational Vision for the Future. The earlier process of Clarifying Organizational Mandates and Mission involved considering a vision for the organization. In practice, visioning may occur in a number of places throughout the strategic planning process. In this step a “vision of success” is developed, which he defines as “a description of what the organization will look like after it successfully implements its strategies and achieves its full potential” (p. 155). In his approach “vision, while it includes mission, goes well beyond it” (p. 155). Bryson states that for smaller, single purpose organizations “visioning” exercises may be used much earlier in the process to develop consensus on the identification of issues and formulation of strategy to deal with those issues. Development of a vision statement can benefit the organization by further defining “the organization’s mission, its basic philosophy and core values, its basic strategies, its performance criteria, its important decision making rules, and its ethical standards” (p. 157). This is another juncture where the process becomes real for the participants, as it makes very clear the gap between present activity and future potential. “A challenging yet achievable vision embodies the tension between what an organization wants and what it can have” (Senge, 1990, p. 25).

Implementing Strategies and Plans Successfully. Smaller, less complex organizations may include this step while Formulating and Adopting Strategies and Plans to Manage the Issues, as described previously. For any organization, the purpose of this step is “to complete the transition from strategic planning to strategic management by incorporating adopted strategies throughout the relevant system” (Bryson, 1995, p. 166). This is accomplished by the development of effective programs, projects, action plans, budgets, and processes by which to implement these changes. An important consideration in this stage is to differentiate between *outputs* and *outcomes*. “*Outputs* are the actual actions, behaviors, products, services, or other direct consequences produced by the policy changes. *Outcomes* are the ramifications of those outputs- that is, their larger meanings” (p. 167). This distinction is critical in evaluating the effectiveness and overall success of the strategic planning process in achieving the vision and mission of the organization as stated in the plan. Bryson states that “Learning is a major theme underlying implementation efforts” (p. 167). Since it is neither possible nor desirable to plan everything in advance, people must learn new procedures and adapt them to situations that arise. In this learning environment “more effective implementation is likely to result, and the next round of strategizing is likely to be better informed” (p. 169).

Reassessing and Revising Strategies and Plans. Effective planning is a continuous process, and Bryson’s use of the term “Strategy Change Cycle” is indicative of the need to continually revisit the strategies and plans that have been formulated. Much of this may occur as part of the ongoing implementation process, but it may need to be a separate activity. Four main reasons are identified by Bryson (1995) that may cause

strategies to fail. Insufficient resources may be devoted to implementation, problems may change, interactions between policies may produce undesirable results, or the political environment may shift. Benefits of this step are “assurance that the new strategy remains responsive to important issues, resolution of residual implementation difficulties, generation of needed energy for strategy renewal, and pruning of areas that are overcrowded with bits and pieces of assorted strategies”

(p. 192). The frequency and formality of this reassessment process would vary depending on the type and nature of the organization. However, it is clear that in the rapidly changing world in which nonprofit organizations operate the mission, vision, goals and strategies of most organizations should be systematically reviewed if the organizations are to remain dynamic and competitive.

Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations

As indicated by the title, this workbook by John Barry produced for the Amherst Wilder Foundation is intended to serve as a guide for nonprofit organizations that wish to produce a strategic plan. Barry (2001) defines strategic planning as “the process of determining: (1) **what** your organization intends to accomplish, and (2) **how** you will direct the organization and its resources toward accomplishing these goals over the coming months and years” (p. 5).

Several reasons for developing a strategic plan are identified:

- Rapidly changing community conditions
- A desire to have a greater impact

New financial pressures or competition

A way to align mission, programs, resources, and relationships (p. 9)

Like Bryson, Barry also identifies limitations or situations where strategic planning should not be undertaken:

Costs can outweigh benefits; the planning process can consume time and money which might be spent more productively on other tasks.

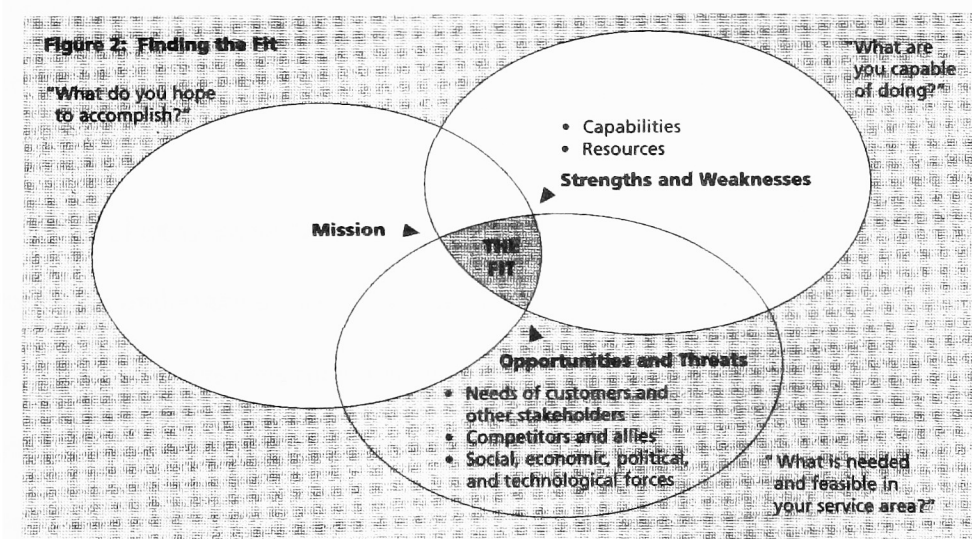
When poor plans are likely; this can be due to faulty assumptions about the future, poor assessment of an organization's capabilities, or poor group dynamics.

Intuition and "creative muddling" are sometimes superior to traditional planning. Gifted and intuitive leaders may obviate the need for a formal planning process. Alternately, "creative muddling" occurs when a skilled team of people- who know each other's talents and abilities- work together creatively and opportunistically to achieve a particular purpose or goal"

When critical problems should be addressed first; this is similar to Bryson's analogy of the organization "whose roof has fallen"

When implementation is unlikely, due to poor leadership or lack of resources. (p. 11)

With respect to process, the "key is to *find the fit* among three forces- your organization's mission, outside opportunities, and your organization's capabilities" (p. 7).



Reprinted from *Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations*, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

Barry (2001) identifies four critical elements required to develop a good plan: “getting good ideas on the table, making good decisions about how to proceed, developing a shared understanding of and commitment to the directions chosen, and a plan which has some heart” (p. 18). By a “plan which has some heart” he means planning “in which participants speak candidly about their hopes for the organization and what it can accomplish, their commitments, and other matters of heart” (p. 18). Clearly this represents a level of involvement and commitment beyond the “plan to plan” described previously; this type of personal commitment to the process is a key ingredient for success.

Barry suggests a five-step process for developing a strategic plan. It contains most of the elements of Bryson’s “Strategy Change Cycle”, albeit in a different sequence. A summary of this process provided by the author is found in Appendix C. The steps will be briefly summarized here for their relevance to Bryson’s process and those used in the case studies.

Step 1: Get Organized In this step it is important that the leaders of the organization considering undertaking this process have a clear understanding of why they are planning and identify any concerns they may have. A steering group or person needs to be identified that can keep the process on track. Many organizations use paid or volunteer consultants to assist with planning, and availability and affordability of outside help must be assessed. A planning process needs to be identified that fits the organization. Barry

states “Nonprofits sometimes run into problems when they try to duplicate the planning process that operates in a different field, sector or situation” (p. 13). Finally it is critical to get the commitment of key people to proceed. This would include the Executive Director, Board of Directors, and key staff.

Step 2: Take Stock (Situation Analysis) This would include meetings to discuss the organization’s past, present, and possible future. It may also be helpful to review recent progress made by the organization, and it provides an opportunity to review the current mission. An analysis of the organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats should also be undertaken. “The task here is not to identify every possible need, opportunity, threat, or force which could possibly influence the organization, but to zero in on a limited number of opportunities or forces that will most affect the organization’s future” (p. 45). In conducting this analysis three kinds of external forces should be considered: customers and other stakeholders; competitors and allies; and social, cultural, economic, political, and technological forces. The final task in taking stock is to summarize the critical issues or choices that have been identified in this process; again, it is suggested that this be limited to four to eight issues most critical to the organization’s future success.

Step 3: Set Direction In this step the organization sorts through the issues identified in Step 2, reaches general agreement on the best direction for the organization, and develops a first draft of the strategic plan. If done properly, “a shared vision or picture of the organization’s future develops- one that is viable and engages people’s energy and

commitment” (p. 52). Barry describes four planning methods that may be used in setting this future direction:

Critical issues approach. With this approach issues previously identified are sequenced, and solutions are selected for each. “As each critical issue is answered, the picture or vision of your organization’s future becomes clearer” (p. 53). This vision is incorporated into the first draft of the strategic plan.

Scenario approach. This is similar to the “vision of success” approach discussed by Bryson. In this approach several different scenarios or visions of the future are evaluated. One preferred scenario is selected, and an effort is made to determine how to make the transition from the present to the preferred future.

Goals approach. This approach is commonly used in the business world, and may work for some nonprofits. Strategic goals are established, and strategies and plans are developed to achieve those goals. These goals and strategies become the first draft of the strategic plan.

Alignment approach. The concept of this approach is “to get the parts of your organization working in sync- or in proper alignment- to accomplish your mission” (p. 54). Three critical dimensions of the organization must be aligned: (1) the mission, (2) programming, and (3) resources and support needed to operate effectively. After these elements are outlined, the planning group identifies which aspects need adjusting and how those adjustments can be made.

Each of these approaches has strengths and limitations. Barry suggests that an approach (or combination of approaches) be picked that fits with the strategic choices

faced by the organization, that is most comfortable given the participants, and fits the time available.

Step 4: Refine and Adopt the Plan At this point a decision needs to be made regarding who will review the draft of the plan. Will it be reviewed by key staff and the planning committee, or by the full Board of Directors? Will it be reviewed by the key stakeholder groups whose input was solicited in Step 2, Taking Stock? While review is time consuming, it will generate the consensus that will be likely to lead to successful implementation. “The result of your reviews should be a plan that is both sound and doable; a plan that people understand and are committed to implementing” (p. 71). After the plan is adopted, typically by the Board of Directors, consideration should be given to “finding a way to recognize and celebrate the hard work of the people who contributed to the planning” (p. 71).

Step 5: Implement the Plan In this step responsibility is established and timelines set for carrying out each major goal, strategy, or task in the plan. If a high level of participation has occurred in Steps 1-4, some of the changes made will have begun prior to the adoption of the plan. This effort is facilitated to the extent that “goals, strategies, and key steps in your strategic plan are translated into objectives, work plans, and budgets for the coming year” (p. 73). The ability to measure results is clearly advantageous in monitoring progress in these areas. Barry recommends yearly updates to the plan, before budgeting for the coming year. Alternately, a major update can be done every three to five years, with minor adjustments in strategies undertaken as needed.

Anne W. Ackerson/A Planning Toolkit

As a consultant associated with the Museum Association of New York, Ms. Ackerson employs many of the approaches described by John Bryson and Bryan Barry. Since a number of the organizations she has worked with are smaller, single purpose organizations her approach consolidates some of the steps described by Bryson. While Bryson has worked with large school districts, libraries, churches, and the Bureau of Statistics within the U.S. Department of Labor, Ms. Ackerson's work is geared towards cultural institutions in upstate New York. A brief overview of the Toolkit she provides to organizations will provide orientation relative to the approaches previously described and the actual cases that are the subject of the study. She recommends ten activities, accomplished sequentially, that will result in the creation of an effective strategic plan.

Organizational Assessment Common to all approaches, this process required developing an understanding of *internal* strengths and weaknesses of the organization. Her approach includes not only an assessment of the organization's activities but also strengths and weaknesses of board, staff, and volunteers.

Community Assessment This involves a scan of the external environment, identifying existing and potential opportunities and threats. An analysis of the organization's competition is included in this process.

Vision Ackerson describes this as “Where your organization wants to be” (p. 1).

Unlike Bryson, her approach places this ahead of a discussion of mission and purpose.

The treatment of this is similar to the “vision of success” approach employed by Bryson and the “scenario” approach to setting direction described by Barry.

A great vision can serve a useful purpose even if it is understood by just a few key people. But the real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of those involved in an enterprise or activity have a common understanding of its goals and direction. That shared sense of desirable future can help motivate and coordinate the kinds of actions that create transformations. (Kotter, 1996, p. 85)

Mission or Purpose This is described as “Where your organization is now. What it does. Who it serves. How it serves” (p. 1). This statement must be outward looking, focusing on the external environment and how the organizational relates to that environment. Rather than list organizational activities, it should identify a larger purpose and intended audience.

Values Ackerson’s approach is distinguished by its incorporation of a values statement. This is intended to amplify or support concepts included in the Mission Statement. A benefit of this exercise is that it may unify staff, board and volunteers in agreeing upon values and behavior which they feel the organization should exhibit.

Goal Setting Two types of goals are identified: “*Strategic Goals*: help move the organization from mission to vision. *Business goals*: enable the organization to fulfill its

mission” (p. 1). Strategic goals should be derived from the vision and mission, and be limited to 3-5 big goals or themes that deal with major elements of the organization such as program, audience, or facilities. Business goals may be more oriented towards building capacity in the organization, such as fundraising, board development, staff or volunteer growth. Strategic goals must be prioritized, and it is recommended that the **SMART test** be used to evaluate and prioritize these:

- ◆ Is this goal Strategic?
- ◆ Is this goal Measurable?
- ◆ Is this goal Attainable?
- ◆ Is this goal Realistic?
- ◆ Is this goal Timely? (p. 6)

Institutionalize Your Work An alignment of the job descriptions and committee structure with the goals and strategies of the organization is an important means of institutionalizing the elements of the plan. This step ensures that vision/mission/values/plans/goals take root in the organization. It also empowers staff, board, committees and volunteers to act on the elements that have been agreed upon. Generating short-term achievements and recognizing and rewarding achievement may also create a coalition to move the work forward.

Action Planning This consists of a detailed calendar of activities used to guide the Board, staff and volunteers as they work toward the goals and objectives contained in the plan. This calendar should include assignment of specific items to individuals or committees, with a timeframe for completion. These may be updated monthly or quarterly at staff meetings or board meetings, and will assist the Board President and/or Executive Director in planning and tracking the flow of work.

Updating and Refreshing Vision, Mission and Values need to be kept visible and current. They should be presented at every opportunity, within and outside the organization. “Always be in a planning mode; this will keep you and your organization flexible and ready for anything!” (p.10)

The process used by Ackerson is illustrated by The Planning Pyramid, which is reproduced as Appendix C. Each of the content/process elements support those above them. *Vision* appears at the top of the pyramid, and is supported by the organization’s *mission*. Supporting the mission and vision are *goals* that address the most critical issues facing the organization. Goals will be achieved by undertaking *strategies* in a systematic way over a period of time. *Tasks* form the base of the pyramid, and become the annual work plan or implementation plan for the organization. These tasks must be assigned to individuals, committees, or work groups, and given timeframes for their completion. Ms. Ackerson states that “Plans often fail because they don’t address the task level of detail. However, it is the identification of tasks that forms the all-important base of the pyramid.”

Conclusion

The three approaches described share a number of common elements in their approach to the strategic planning process. The sequencing of actions varies, and the type of process employed is dictated to a certain extent by the size and nature of the organization doing the planning. As Ms. Ackerson pointed out in an interview, “the end

goals are the same but there are a number of different ways of getting there” Bryson (1995) emphasizes in his discussion of the Strategy Change Cycle that “Strategic thinking and acting are more important than any particular approach to strategic planning” (p. 22). Through examining the work of these planners it is clear that a willingness to envision the future and plan for it is critical to the success of any organization.

Chapter Three will discuss the procedure used in evaluating the strategic planning process for the two study organizations, and establish criteria and potential deliverables or outcomes which may be expected. In addition, key factors in the success or failure of planning efforts will be identified. The framework established for evaluating the strategic planning process will be used to examine the experience of the study organizations with their respective planning processes in Chapter 4.

The visionary is the only realist.

Federico Fellini, Filmmaker

Chapter 3

Procedure

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Chapter 2 has discussed a number of different approaches that may be utilized in undertaking a strategic planning process for an organization. While different organizations may share common goals or outcomes they hope to achieve by undertaking a planning process, different methods and strategies may be employed in the effort to achieve these goals or outcomes.

The planning process is also profoundly affected by the characteristics and efforts of the individuals and groups that undertake this process. Assessing the efforts of these individuals and groups is by nature qualitative; the mix of personalities and skills brought into play that contribute to the success or failure of a planning effort do not lend themselves to a quantitative analysis.

There are, however, criteria that may be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a planning process. In addition, in the course of the study a number of deliverables or outcomes that may occur were identified. These will be described later in this chapter and used to evaluate the processes undertaken by the Slate Valley Museum and the Big Springs Historical Society in Chapter 4. These criteria are subjective by nature, which necessitates a qualitative approach to applying these criteria to the organizations studied.

To the extent that the deliverables or outcomes may be quantified they have been, but the subjective nature of many of these also requires a qualitative approach.

Case Study Format

The Case Study Method has been used in the study. In this method, “the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon (“the case”) bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time” (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1989). For purposes of the study it was decided to examine the experiences of two different “cases” or organizations. These two organizations represent a range of budget, staffing, functional areas and governance similar to the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society (LPNEHS). (See Appendix A for a comparison of these organizations.)

Data Collection Procedures

In an effort to find historical organizations similar in size and function to LPNEHS an inquiry was made to the Upstate History Alliance, an association of historical organizations from Upstate New York based in Oneonta, New York. The Alliance administers a grant program targeted towards strategic planning, and has a number of member organizations that have undertaken this process. The Executive Director of the Alliance also suggested speaking to Anne Ackerson at the Museum Association of New York, a consultant that has assisted a large number of organizations with strategic plans.

Ms. Ackerson provided a list of organizations she has worked with in planning, ranging from small all volunteer organizations to larger organizations with a number of paid staff. With her assistance two different organizations were selected to contact, based on their similarity to the LPNEHS. She also provided a copy of *A Planning Toolkit*, a collection of material used with her nonprofit clients.

In the Slate Valley Museum case, the full time Executive Director was contacted and asked to provide information relating to their strategic planning process. The documents provided included a proposal by Anne Ackerson outlining a recommended process, timetables and agendas developed for meetings, drafts of vision and mission statements, and a copy of the *Long Range Strategic Plan, 2002-2005* and *Workplans* that were developed as a result of the process.

The Big Springs Historical Society is primarily a volunteer organization, and the President of the Society was the principal point of contact. They provided a copy of the consultant's Preliminary Overview Report, correspondence directed to Board members and agendas for the planning meetings, worksheets used in discussing and developing vision, mission, and goals statements, and an *Action Plan* that was the result of their efforts.

After completing a review of materials provided by these organizations, telephone interviews were conducted followed by personal interviews. Prior to the personal interviews a letter was sent asking for specific information relating to the processes

undertaken by their respective organizations. (See Appendix D for a copy of letters upon which the interviews were based). By utilizing this approach the same questions were asked of each organization, in an effort to make a comparison of the two organizations utilizing the same methodology. As might be expected the interviews also covered a wide range of areas outside this structure that were pertinent to the efforts of the study organizations. The substance of these interviews is included in Chapter 4 as part of the evaluation of the processes undertaken by the two study organizations.

Data Analysis Procedures

As previously stated in Chapter 2, the literature pertaining to strategic planning provides a framework that may be used to evaluate the efforts of the study organizations. This framework has been used to analyze the material provided by the subject organizations as well as information gained in the interviewing process. Particular attention has been paid to the reasons *why* the organizations undertook the process, *who* was involved, the *form* that the process took, and *outcomes* of the planning effort.

From the review of literature and discussions with Anne Ackerson, a number of criteria were also developed to evaluate the planning processes, with subquestions relating to the criteria :

Evidence of a thoughtful approach to the process. Was the timeframe used realistic?
How broad was involvement in developing the plan, within and outside the organization?
What were the methods used to achieve the process elements?

Outside Input. Was an effort made to solicit input from stakeholders outside the organization? From whom and how was this input solicited? How was this input used to inform the process?

Discussion. Were the planning documents influenced by a thoughtful discussion of issues? Was an effort made to examine a wide range of actions and alternatives? Were some of the actions and alternatives considered outside the current activities of the organization? This criteria is analogous to Barry's (2001) "plan which has some heart, where participants speak candidly about their hopes for the organization" (p. 18).

Vision/Mission/Goals. Do these tie into each other on multiple levels? Are the ideas and language used reinforced throughout all the planning documents, from a strategic plan down through work or action plans?

Goals and Strategies. Does the plan and related documents prioritize the goals and strategies identified as a result of the planning process?

Annual Workplan. Have the goals and strategies contained in the plan been organized into an annual workplan, with specific timeframes and responsibility for these assigned?

Ongoing Evaluation and Update. Are there mechanisms within the plan and the organization that will include evaluation and updating of the plan on a regular basis? Have performance standards been incorporated into this review, where possible?

A number of deliverables were also identified as potential outcomes of the process, some of which may be quantifiable:

Board Development. Did the process and resulting action plans enhance the Board's

involvement in the organization? Were new Board members sought with specific skills that would aid implementation of elements of the plan?

Strengthening of Organizational Structure. Did the process initiate any strengthening of the staff and committee structure of the organization? Did these changes align with the goals and strategies identified in the plan?

Staffing. If there is paid staff, were staff assignments changed to align with goals and strategies identified? Were additional staffing requirements identified and implemented as a result of the plan?

Funding. Were funding needs identified in the planning process? Were sources of this funding identified and was this funding obtained?

Program Development. Were new or improved programming areas identified as a result of the planning effort? Were these programs successfully implemented?

Membership. Was membership in the organization increased as a result of a need identified in the planning process? How was this increase in membership achieved?

Collections Policy. Was the Collections Policy of the organization changed to reflect the mission or vision of the organization generated during the planning process? Was the focus of the historical organization broadened or narrowed with regards to defining what should be preserved and displayed as a function of the organization?

In addition to criteria developed and the identification of potential deliverables, an effort was also made to identify key factors for success or failure of the individual planning efforts. It is clear from the literature that certain elements can influence the

viability of a planning process, and experience of the study organizations was indicative of a number of these key factors or elements.

The likelihood of success is greatly enhanced by an institutional commitment to Planning, especially from the Board and Staff. In addition, to the extent that committees of the organization are structured according to goals and strategies that have been identified the plan truly drives the organization. An implementation plan that is created and followed is also critical to a successful planning effort.

The influence of people on the planning process is also critical. In addition to the institutional commitment referenced above, a person or group of people must constantly advocate on behalf of the planning effort and “carry the ball” John Bryson refers to this person as a “process champion”, and this person or group provides the leadership to move the organization through what can be a very difficult process, at least initially.

Reasons for failure are in many cases the inverse of elements or factors that contribute to success. If there is no real institutional commitment, or this commitment is not sustained, the likelihood of failure is greatly increased. If there is no way to implement the plan, in particular because it is not integrated into the life of the organization, the results are likely to be minimal. A plan may also be too ambitious or unfocused, which increases the likelihood that the small wins or gains that lead to achievement of bigger goals may never take place.

In undertaking a strategic planning process organizations may differ in the reasons they have chosen this approach, methods employed, and goals and outcomes they hope to achieve. Through the review of literature and discussions with Anne Ackerson, certain criteria and deliverables were identified which are applicable to the study organizations. In addition key factors for success or failure were identified for organizations undertaking this process. These criteria, deliverables and key factors for success provide a framework for a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the strategic planning process. Chapter 4 will utilize this framework to evaluate the experiences of the Slate Valley Museum and the Big Springs Historical Society.

Chapter 4

Outcome of the Study and its Relation to Theory and Literature

“People make history; things do not”.

To Collect or to Educate

The Slate Valley Museum and Big Springs Historical Society both undertook a strategic planning process and experienced outcomes that met their expectations. However, these outcomes differed between the organizations. This was a result of differences in size and functions, presence of paid staff or lack thereof, commitment of the participants, and presence of an adequate implementation structure. The two processes will be described and examined using the criteria and deliverables previously presented in Chapter 3. In addition, key factors for success and failure will be considered both from the viewpoint of the participants and in relation to planning theory and the literature describing this process discussed in Chapter 2.

Slate Valley Museum

The Slate Valley Museum, located in Granville, New York was founded in its present form in 1997. The focus of the museum is interpretation of the history of the slate industry in a region along the Vermont and New York border. Slate quarrying has been the principal industry of the region for over 150 years, and “slate provides the common vein for visitors of all ages to explore geology, tools and technology, local history and immigration.” (Slate Valley brochure).

There had been a small Slate Museum in the community from 1980 to 1996, and a group formed to create the Slate Valley Museum Foundation and house a new museum in a reconstructed 19th century Dutch barn at a new location. Most of the members of that group became members of the Board of Directors of the new museum. The facility is open year round four days a week and charges an admission fee of \$2.50. The facility offers interpretive displays on the history of the slate industry, historic photographs, artwork and a series of programs both in the museum and throughout the region. School programs and group tours are offered in the museum and outreach programs are also offered by a museum educator.

The Slate Valley Museum hosts approximately 7,000 visitors annually, and has an operating budget of \$110,000. Staff consists of a full time Executive Director, a part time educator, and a part time registrar that also serves as an assistant to the Executive Director. There are approximately 20 volunteers that assist in the operation of the museum facility. The museum is governed by a 13 member Board of Directors. (See Appendix A for summary of study organizations).

Mary Lou Willits, the Executive Director, was the contact for the study. Ms. Willits is the second person to have held that position, and has been with the museum for 2 ½ years as of February, 2003. The impetus for undertaking a strategic planning process came from the Executive Director, as a plan was required to be eligible for operational funding grants from the New York State Council of the Arts (NYSCA). She also saw the

planning process as a way to align the Board with goals that had been identified for the organization.

The process of developing the strategic plan and associated work plans commenced in June, 2001 and was completed in January, 2002. The process was paid for with a \$1,500 grant administered by the Upstate History Alliance and facilitated by Anne Ackerson, a consultant associated with the Museum Association of New York.

Prior to the first session with the consultant a “List of Considerations” was drawn up by Ms. Willits based on issues identified by her and the Board of Directors. The first planning session consisted of an overview of the process, as well as an exercise in which the participants envisioned a future for the community and region as well as the Slate Valley Museum. A tentative Vision Statement was developed as a result of the first planning session.

A second session was held in July of 2001 without the facilitator. At that time a draft of the Vision Statement was prepared, and an existing Mission Statement was amended to reflect discussion that had taken place. In addition goal statements were drafted organized around six functional areas that had been identified. These areas were not standing committees of the organization according to its by-laws, but were to be committees driven by development of the plan.

A third meeting was held with members of the Board and the facilitator in August, 2001. At this meeting the Vision Statement was again reviewed, and the Mission Statement was further revised. The goal statements developed previously were reviewed and broken down between *strategic goals*, which move the organization from mission to vision, and *business goals*, which enable the organization to fulfill its mission. This approach is consistent with that described in Ms. Ackerson's *Planning Toolkit*. At this time *strategies* and *tasks* were also discussed for the first time. Strategies would be a set of activities chosen to meet goals. Tasks would be specific steps that make up each activity, given a time frame and assigned to groups or individuals. These would be included in an Action Plan developed after completion of the strategic plan.

A Strategic Plan Committee consisting of the Executive Director and four members of the Board was appointed to create a draft Strategic Plan for review by the Board. This was a critical component, as Ms. Willits stated that she could not have done this alongside her regular responsibilities. The process was also aided by one member that did most of the writing, as synthesizing the comments made during the planning sessions was a difficult task. The Board of the Slate Valley Museum adopted a Strategic Plan for 2002-05 on December 11, 2001. The plan articulates the vision and mission developed through the process and identifies goals, strategies and tasks organized around six key areas.

On January 12, 2002 the Board of Directors held an all day retreat to develop detailed work plans for implementation of the strategic plan. At this time members of the

community were invited to attend, including the Mayor and Director of the Chamber of Commerce. These work plans identified action tasks necessary to effect the strategies and goals for each key area. Each specific task identified the person or group responsible, a timeframe, cost and funding options, a measurement standard, partners, and impact. The format used for development of these workplans was similar to that used by the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation in Plymouth Notch, Vermont. (See appendix E for a sample Workplan for Slate Valley Museum).

The criteria established in Chapter 3 and an interview with the Executive Director of the museum have been used to evaluate the process undertaken by this organization and the planning documents that resulted.

Evidence of a thoughtful approach to the process. As stated previously development of a strategic plan was sought by the Executive Director, Mary Lou Willits. Both Ms. Willits and the Board President were the “champions” of the process. The meetings involved all members of the Board, and she stated that all agreed the process was timely and an opportunity for a fresh start. As a result the Board was fully engaged in the process and there was a good commitment to the development of a plan for the organization.

Outside Input. Input from outside stakeholders was not sought until development of the workplans. This could be viewed as a weakness in the process, but they felt they weren’t ready to do that in the early stages. John Bryson also states in *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* that this may be an acceptable practice, particularly for small, single purpose entities.

Discussion. Thoughtful discussion of the issues is important, and should include diverse viewpoints and visions for the organization. The Board President supported a wide range of discourse, and the facilitation by the consultant was especially helpful in this regard.

Vision/Mission/Goals. Ideally these should tie into each other on multiple levels. The Slate Valley Museum's Strategic Plan and the Workplans that support it are consistent in the ideas and language that are used throughout.

Prioritization of goals and strategies. The Slate Valley documents do not rank order or otherwise prioritize the goals and strategies that are identified. Ms. Willits indicated that to a certain extent they reflect a "natural progression", and grant writing and awards would affect the implementation of some of the tasks and strategies identified.

Annual workplan. Workplans were developed for each of the key areas identified, and a sample is included as Appendix E. These work plans are very specific in terms of the tasks to be accomplished, assigning responsibility, timeframes, cost and funding options, measurement standard if appropriate, partners outside the organization, and impact on accomplishment of the task. A mechanism exists for annual updating and evaluation of these work plans annually.

Ms. Willits also identified a number of *deliverables* as a result of this process:

Organizational Development. The Board is aligned and supports the efforts of the Executive Director and strategic plan implementation efforts.

Funding. A plan was required to receive operating funding from the New York State Council of the Arts (NYSCA), and they were awarded \$12,000 per year for three years. In addition they have received a second three-year award of \$2,500 per year.

Community Service. Ms. Willits feels that they are serving the community better as a result of this process. Both on-site and outreach programs have been expanded.

Staffing. The part-time staff educator position has been increased from 2 to 3 days, and the plan calls for the registrar position which also functions as assistant to the Executive Director to become full-time within 3 years.

Membership. Membership has increased as a result of the programming described above, and a membership drive is planned to coincide with institutional development efforts.

A high level of involvement and commitment from members of the Board of Directors was a critical element of their success. It is important that this “buy-in” take place early and be sustained through a very time consuming process. Whether this commitment can be sustained over time remains to be seen, as they are just in the second year of a three-year plan. A dedicated Strategic Planning Committee that could undertake producing the documents required was also identified as a crucial need for successfully producing a plan.

A weakness was that a financial plan did not accompany the strategic plan. As described previously prioritization of tasks has been driven by the availability of grant monies or other funds. It was felt that producing a financial plan as part of the overall strategic plan would have been beneficial. This experience supports John Bryson’s (1995) contention regarding the importance of not separating budgeting and planning functions. He states “budgets often represent the most important and consequential policy statements that governments or nonprofits make” (p. 173).

In Ms. Willits opinion the strategic planning process was extremely successful. The process was “pivotal” in moving from what she termed an “entrepreneurial stage” to a more professional stage. As a relatively new organization they were forced to “fly by the seat of their pants”, but as they grew this approach would no longer work. The need for NYSCA funding, along with an increase in programming, required a more structured organization. This structure would provide a means to achieve more clearly defined goals as well as the strategies and tasks that could be implemented to achieve those goals. The plan has provided a “roadmap” for the Board and staff of the Slate Valley Museum as they work to fulfill the mission and vision that was defined as an outcome of the strategic planning process.

Big Springs Historical Society

The Big Springs Historical Society was founded in 1936 and moved to its present location in an early 20th century school building in the early 1950's. The function of the Society since its inception has been the preservation and stewardship of the history of the communities of Caledonia and Mumford, New York. The museum houses a sizable collection of objects and archival materials relating to the history and industry of the region. The facility operates year round and is open to the public two afternoons per week with free admission. In addition, special programs are offered throughout the year for the general public and school groups.

The Society has an operating budget of \$12,000 per year. There is no paid administrative staff, with the exception of one curator that supervises volunteers working on collections that is paid for four hours of work per week. The Curator is assisted by a core group of 12 volunteers in caring for the collections of the museum. In addition a small staff is paid to operate the museum two days a week and for special events. Approximately 1,000 people annually visit the museum facility, which is located in Caledonia, New York. A 13 member Board of Trustees is responsible for managing the affairs of the Society. (See Appendix A for a comparison of the study organizations.)

The contact for the study was Jean Guthrie, President of the Board. Ms. Guthrie was the primary advocate of undertaking a strategic planning process for the Society. When she assumed the Presidency in 1997 the Society lacked strong leadership and was in danger of ceasing to operate. Only one Board meeting was being held per year, and paid membership in the organization had declined to 35 members. The consultant utilized in facilitating a strategic planning process was funded through a \$2,000 grant from the Upstate History Alliance.

In advance of the consultant's first visit Ms. Guthrie provided members of the Board with a Vision – Mission – Goals worksheet that included a number of questions relating to the organization. The purpose of this was to define the concepts of vision, mission and goals and get Board members to articulate where they saw the museum then and where they see it in the future.

The process was initiated on August 9, 1998 with a visit by Anne Ackerson, the consultant retained through the grant program. This included a tour of the museum and a meeting with members of the Board of Trustees. At this meeting members of the Board discussed the Society's history, development of the museum, and their hopes for the future. "Now at a developmental crossroads, the Big Springs Historical Society Museum is looking towards its future, knowing it must grow and professionalize if it is to maintain its collections and become a positive force in its community" (Ackerson, 1998, Preliminary Overview Report).

A visioning exercise was conducted, and a draft vision and mission statement resulted. Big Springs did have a prior mission statement that was felt to be lacking because it focused on Caledonia whereas the Board felt that the museum really had a regional focus. In addition the means by which this new purpose or mission would be met was identified and organized into seven areas. Ms. Guthrie indicated in an interview that identification of these areas was helpful in that it provided structure that had not existed, and was a way to involve people and prioritize their concerns. The consultant also provided a "Prioritizing Matrix", where needs that had been identified could be evaluated based on the criteria of Urgent/ Not Urgent and Important/ Not Important. This was helpful in focusing the participants on areas that demanded their immediate attention and areas that would come later in the action plans to be developed.

A second meeting with the consultant was held in the Fall of 1998. At this time the vision and mission statements were refined, and the seven areas identified in the first

meeting were organized under four goals for the organization. These areas did not reflect standing committees of the Society, and again provided a structure for their efforts that had not existed previously.

The final meeting of the consultant with members of the Board was held on February 20, 1999. At this time key steps or action items necessary to achieve the four goals identified were discussed. The Action Plan that resulted from the process was written by Anne Ackerson in consultation with Jean Guthrie, Board President. Ms. Guthrie stated that she would not have been able to complete this in a timely manner, and Ms. Ackerson agreed to undertake this task. An Action Plan for April – December, 2000 was adopted early in 2000. As part of this plan an “item list to be further refined” was included for 2001 and 2002. (See Appendix F for a sample of the Big Springs Historical Society Action Plan).

In addition to development of the Action Plan, the Board also went through a process where a Job Description for Board members was developed. This document clarified roles, responsibilities and obligations of both new and old Board members. According to Ms. Guthrie several members of the Board opted not to participate in the planning process. Development of the job description as well as the planning process itself prompted a change in the composition of the Board, with some existing members resigning and being replaced by new members. Some of the new members had specific skills that could address issues that had been raised and improve the vitality of the

organization. In her view this change was critical if the organization was to progress and was an important by-product of the planning process.

Another result of the planning process was a revised Constitution and Bylaws for the Society that was adopted on August 8, 2000. This document reflected the vision and mission that had been developed and formalized a committee structure for the organization. Ms. Guthrie stated that this was an important aspect of positioning the organization for future efforts and implementation of the Action Plan that had been developed as a result of the planning process.

An examination of the process undertaken by Big Springs utilizing the same criteria and deliverables used previously will illustrate the differences in the processes utilized by each organization and the outcomes experienced.

Evidence of a thoughtful approach to the process. As previously discussed the President of the Board “championed” the process for the Big Springs Historical Society. All members of the Board did not participate in the planning sessions. Ms. Guthrie indicated that members of the Board trusted her to take them through the process, but this did not create the optimum level of “buy-in” described in the literature. John Bryson notes that the process is “deliberately disruptive”, and this aspect of their undertaking caused a turnover in membership on the Board. Ms. Guthrie considered this to have been a positive outcome of the process as they were able to take on new members with the interest and skills that would be necessary to support their future efforts.

Outside Input. The Big Springs experience was similar to that of Slate Valley with regards to outside input. When they reached the stage of developing an Action Plan the Mayor, Librarian and Town Historian were involved in the development of this document. While this input was used to inform the process of action planning it was not utilized in the development of the vision, mission and goals that had preceded this. This could be seen as a weakness in the process, but they did not feel they could effectively involve outside stakeholders until they “put their house in order”

Discussion. Although this did not include all current members of the Board it was felt that those involved engaged in a meaningful dialogue and considered a wide range of issues and actions. Ms. Guthrie stated that they began the process at the lowest point possible in terms of the health of the organization, and successfully “confronted their demons” Those that remained through the process and new Board members were able to frankly acknowledge their past and commit to moving the organization forward.

Vision/Mission/Goals. The documents produced by Big Springs as a result of the process were much more limited than those produced by Slate Valley. Whereas Slate Valley developed a Strategic Plan and separate Workplans, Big Springs simply developed an Action Plan stating the Vision, Mission, Goals and Action Items. However, the ideas and language used do tie into each other in a number of different areas. This is likely a result of the plan having been written by the consultant that facilitated the process. The Board Member Job Description and revised Constitution and Bylaws developed as a result of the planning process also utilize the vision and mission developed by the group.

Prioritization of goals and strategies. Ms. Guthrie felt that this was difficult due to the interrelated nature of many of the action items developed to implement the goals. In

practice, many actions would need to occur simultaneously in order to move forward with particular items contained in the plan. Due to the limited scope of the organization and its goals the lack of prioritization may not be an impediment to successful implementation.

Annual Work Plan. A three year Action Plan was developed containing the vision, mission and four goals with action items to implement these. It has been used as a guideline by the President and members of the Board. It has not been formally updated or evaluated since its adoption, and this needs to be done. This can be seen as a weakness in the process, due at least in part to the all-volunteer nature of the organization. In the absence of administrative staff, institutionalizing this ongoing process would again require a “champion” from the Board and/or establishment of a long range planning committee. President Guthrie assumed this role for the initial planning process but it may be desirable for another Board member to assume this role.

Ms. Guthrie also identified a number of *deliverables* that resulted from this process:

Board Development/Organizational Development. As discussed previously some turnover in Board members was an unanticipated result of the process. However, this churning of the organization’s leadership allowed new members to be added with different skills and interests. This was considered to be a positive outcome, and one that may have been difficult to achieve in any other way.

Strengthening of Organizational Structure. The organization was at a very low point when the process was initiated, and without changes may have ceased to function. The committee structure incorporated in the revised Constitution and Bylaws as well as the

goal areas identified in the Action Plans have provided structure that had not existed previously. Ms. Guthrie indicated that she felt confident she could step down now and the organization would be capable of carrying on without her. This would probably not have been possible prior to undertaking their planning process.

Staffing. The organization now pays for a part-time curator as well as for weekly cleaning of the museum. These needs were identified and funded as a result of the plan.

Program Development. New programs have been developed as a result of the plan, resulting in increased membership, visibility and funding as noted below. More people are visiting the museum and there has been an increase in children's visitation, which was one of needs identified in the Audience Development goal included in the plan.

Funding. The planning process and improved programming that resulted has improved the organization's visibility in the community. Support from the Caledonia Village Board, both in cash and in-kind, has increased as a result of this visibility.

Membership. The organization's membership has increased from 35 to 200, again as a result of visibility and programming.

Collections Policy. There has been no change in this, although it was identified as an area needing attention in the consultant's initial report. A collections policy identifies what the museum should and should not be exhibiting and allows the organization to refuse gifts and remove items not considered to be within the function of the museum. This can prevent a small museum from becoming a "community attic", as described in the consultant's report.

Ms. Guthrie feels that the process undertaken by Big Springs was successful, but emphasized that change is stressful. A critical element that she identified was the ability to “park your own ego” and find a way to get others connected to the process. The services of a paid consultant were critical, and in her opinion the process could not have been undertaken without professional assistance. This would clearly seem to be the case since the consultant not only facilitated the planning sessions but also produced the final planning documents.

Evaluating the Big Springs process in the context of the literature, the situation faced by the organization is closely related to that described by John Bryson as “an organization whose roof has fallen” This was one of several situations described in Chapter 2 in which undertaking a strategic planning process may not be advisable. The fact that this process was considered to be successful by the President of the organization is probably due to the more limited extent of their efforts and the commitment of those that continued to be involved in the process. Ms. Guthrie stated that “the process of planning and organizational work with Anne was a vehicle to move ahead in a psychological sense as much as physical.” By limiting their efforts to annual action planning based on vision-mission discussion and goal setting their exposure was lessened and there was an increased likelihood of success.

For Big Springs the process was as valuable as the outcomes produced by the process. As Anne Ackerson stated in her Preliminary Overview Report, “The processes of developing a vision, reevaluating a mission and writing a plan of action should be just as

useful and educational as the end products themselves.” The process of developing the plan produced positive changes in the composition of the Board long before any of the outcomes or deliverables that have been identified took place. The remaining and new Board members have a renewed sense of what the organization is, who it should be serving, and how it should be serving them. The fact that the plan does not address all the areas addressed in the consultant’s report and that its total implementation and updating is uncertain appears to be less important than the fact that they are functioning at a higher level than prior to undertaking the planning effort.

The experience of this primarily volunteer organization also points out the fact that it is difficult for organizations like this to embrace, much less stick to, an involved strategic planning effort. While Bryan Barry’s *Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations* may be used as a guide to undertaking such an effort, it is apparent that in the absence of qualified staff undertaking this task and following through on it within the organization would be difficult at best. The services of a consultant were critical for both of the study organizations, but in the Big Springs experience it is unlikely the process would have yielded any results without the assistance of someone whose job involved completing the project.

Based on the experiences of the two study organizations and the literature, conclusions and recommendations regarding the value of strategic planning for small nonprofits will be discussed in Chapter 5. By analyzing the strategic planning process for these organizations key factors for success or failure will also be identified. In considering the

characteristics and needs of the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society some conclusions can be drawn that will indicate the value and likelihood of success of a strategic planning process for that organization. It is hoped that these conclusions can inform the actions of the Society's Board as they consider undertaking this process and planning for the future of the organization.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

The environment in which all organizations operate is constantly changing, presenting new challenges to these organizations. In the world of nonprofits these challenges include increased competition for membership, audiences and funding. For many nonprofits the Board of Trustees must serve a management function in addition to their normal policy and governance functions. These Boards and the organizations they represent must constantly assess the current activities of their organizations and also simultaneously plan for their future.

Strategic planning has increasingly been used by nonprofits as a tool for evaluating their current mission and activities as well as envisioning a future course for these organizations. Traditional long range planning focuses on goals and objectives, typically providing a picture of where an organization will be in the future if they continue with a set of existing programs and activities. Strategic planning, with its emphasis on developing a vision and mission for the organization, is directed towards an examination of not only what an organization does but also what it might do in the future. With its emphasis on assessing an organization's internal and external environment the strategic planning process also addresses the changing environment previously discussed. Based on these characteristics John Bryson (1995) states "Strategic planning is more likely to result in a 'vision of success' for the organization that can provide a flexible, action-oriented plan to guide the activities of an organization" (p. 35).

By examining the experiences of the study organizations with a strategic planning process some conclusions can be drawn regarding the value of this process for small nonprofits. Based on these conclusions some recommendations can be made regarding whether this process would be suitable for the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society and other organizations that are similar in size and function.

It is apparent that the services of a paid professional are critical in development of a strategic plan for a small organization. Grant programs are available to wholly or partially pay the consultants that can provide this service. The consultants can share their experience with other organizations and provide structure in a process that may be very disruptive for the participants. By facilitating an exercise whereby the mission and vision of the organization is examined, the consultant can help produce a plan that is truly strategic, as it looks beyond the organization's current activities to explore possibilities for the future. The resulting candid and wide-ranging dialogue among the participants increases the likelihood of producing what Bryan Barry (2001) calls "a plan which has some heart" (p. 18). This type of personal commitment to the process is a key ingredient for success.

The experience of the study organizations also demonstrates the need to tailor the process to the organization. Small organizations with little paid staff will have difficulty executing a highly involved process and similarly experience difficulty implementing a plan whose scope does not match the capabilities of the organization. The action planning process based on a vision-mission discussion and goal setting for the Big

Big Springs Historical Society was all that could be expected from a primarily volunteer organization. For the Slate Valley Museum the presence of paid administrative staff allowed them to develop a separate Strategic Plan and then develop Workplans that identified the strategies and tasks required to implement the goals identified in the strategic plan.

The health of the organization is also a critical factor in designing a process that can realistically be completed. The fact that the Big Springs Historical Society was to a great extent dysfunctional when the process was undertaken imposed a severe limitation on the results that could be expected from the process. Slate Valley had the advantage of a functioning staff and an engaged Board of Trustees. This allowed the organization to go through a more involved process with a result being achieved in a shorter period of time.

All of the literature as well as experiences of the organizations studied emphasizes the importance of agreement among key leaders of the organization regarding the process. The purpose and worth of producing a plan must be established in order to create broad sponsorship and establish the legitimacy of the process. Participants must understand what the process will involve and establish realistic expectations for the outcomes. In the Big Springs experience support was not broad based and this limited what could be accomplished. A critical part of this agreement must be to commit enough time, people, and administrative and support services to ensure the process will be completed and implementation will take place.

The importance of the “process champion” described by John Bryson cannot be overstated. The presence and ability of a person or group of people to lead a Board of volunteers through a long and arduous process that is disruptive is crucial. In addition it is highly desirable to have a decision making or advisory body to oversee the process. Slate Valley had a working Strategic Plan committee that was able to synthesize the discussion at planning meetings and produce their planning documents internally. This led to a higher level of “buy-in” within the organization and produced a document tailored to the needs and expectations of the participants. The presumption is more effective implementation, although it is too early to ascertain whether this will be the case. The Big Springs document was produced by the consultant and has not been updated, which may be indicative of the difficulty of future implementation efforts.

The type of leadership that is exercised in the planning process is also important. As John Bryson (1995) points out, “Effective leadership is a collective enterprise, involving many different people playing different roles at different times” (p. 212). The notion of “collective leadership” relies on teams and sharing power, responsibility and accountability. This type of leadership will create the dialogue and discussion necessary to make the process meaningful to the participants. Jean Guthrie’s characterization of this concept as “parking your own ego” seems particularly apt, as it was the only way to get others connected to the process.

To the greatest extent possible the strategic plan should also be translated into workplans and budgets. Although workplans or action plans were created for both of the

study organizations the lack of a financial component was identified as a weakness of the Slate Valley process. Since accomplishment of any strategy or task is likely to require a commitment of financial resources in addition to time this is considered to be an important aspect of creating a plan that is both realistic and capable of implementation.

The committee structure of the organization should be changed to align with the goals and strategies identified in the plan, a process Anne Ackerson calls “institutionalizing your work” This provides a means of channeling the resources required to the areas that have been identified as a result of the plan. Both study organizations changed their operational structure to reflect goals that were identified as a result of their respective processes; while this does not guarantee implementation it greatly increases the likelihood that this will take place.

Regardless of the outcomes experienced there was value in undertaking a strategic planning process. The level of success in producing a plan and implementing its elements will vary due to the factors previously discussed. The Slate Valley experience could be considered to have been more successful due to the organization’s strength in these areas. The Big Springs process was less successful due to weaknesses in many of these same areas. However, the act of going through the planning process was seen to be beneficial for Big Springs due to the changes it created in the organization and improved focus that resulted. The process can operate and deliver value at different levels based on the characteristics of the organizations undertaking the process. For Big Springs a

dedicated effort will be required to take their planning and implementation efforts to the next level.

Based on interviews with the study organizations and examination of their planning documents it appears that many of the benefits identified in the literature regarding strategic planning were obtained. They undertook a critical examination of their current activities and agreed upon a vision for the future of their organizations. Critical issues were focused on and their structure was changed to reflect these issues and address the goals identified in the plans. Roles and responsibilities were clarified and a learning environment was created where teamwork was promoted. In his discussion of these benefits John Bryson (1995) states that it is unlikely that an organization will experience all of these the first time through the process. To the extent that the process truly becomes a cycle where the plan is assessed and updated on a regular basis the benefits of the process should accrue over time and create value for the leaders of these organizations and the communities they serve.

Based on the study some recommendations may be made regarding the viability of a strategic planning process for the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Society is at a crossroads. A change in the composition of the Board of Trustees has brought different ideas and interpretations of the mission of the organization. These must be considered in light of its past and existing activities and the efforts of long-serving Board members that have brought the organization to where it is today. In essence, a process is needed to achieve consensus among the Directors of the

Society regarding positive changes that may be introduced while maintaining those elements of its current activities that have value for the community.

The elements necessary for the success of such a process are present in the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society. Grants are available to provide professional assistance, and funds exist that can be used to supplement grant monies if necessary. The leadership of the organization has expressed a willingness to undertake a planning process, but are unsure how to move forward. A likely “process champion” exists on the Board, and a decision-making or advisory body could be formed to guide and inform the process with the assistance of a consultant.

The Society employs a part-time Executive Director, but leading and managing the process would be outside the core responsibilities of this position. As the Slate Valley case demonstrated, even a full time Executive Director simply could not lead a planning process and continue their regular duties. However, the participation of this individual would be critical in the planning stage and indispensable in the development of action plans for implementing the goals identified.

Timing will be an issue in considering a planning process for the Society. A new Executive Director has been hired in 2003 and will require a whole season to become acquainted with the museum and existing programming. Three new Members of the Board of Directors also need to become familiar with their responsibilities and current activities of the Society. The experience of the case studies emphasized the importance

of a high level of informed participation by all leaders of the organizations. For this reason it is anticipated that late 2003 or 2004 would be the earliest time that a productive planning process could be undertaken.

With regards to the scope of the planning effort, a process similar to that undertaken by Big Springs would have a higher likelihood of success. The Society could benefit from a vision-mission discussion and goal setting, and could be expected to successfully implement action plans that would result. However, a more involved strategic planning process would be difficult to execute and implement. A process should be designed that can realistically be completed and implemented, focusing on achieving small successes before moving on to larger issues and goals in subsequent rounds of planning.

For the study organizations, development of different scenarios through the visioning exercise had great value. The required analysis of forces internal and external to the organizations helped them to assess the impact of these forces on their current activities and what their capabilities might be in the future. The themes that recurred in the futures envisioned provided a basis for consensus on the future direction of the organizations. Development of these visions or scenarios was used as a method for informing the strategic planning process, thereby expanding the possibilities for future change both within and outside the organizations.

Based on the experiences of the study organizations, it can be concluded that a strategic planning process has the potential to effect a transformation in an organization.

The deliverables identified as a result of the process changed both the nature of the organizations and the type and scale of services offered to their members and publics. Organizational development was a key outcome, in terms of development of the Board of Trustees and staff as well as changes in organizational structure necessary to effect change. Increased funding was secured, which facilitated program development and a higher level of community service. Membership was increased and diversified, allowing the organizations to identify and serve new constituencies. In general the planning process can transform the organization into a more forward thinking and broad based body better suited to evolve and meet the challenges confronting them as they plan for their future.

A willingness to envision the future and plan for it is critical to the success of any organization. A strategic planning process can provide a means of identifying the current strengths of the organization and opportunities that exist. As Bryan Barry (2001) observes, it is a good way to “find the fit” between mission, opportunities, and capabilities. In addition the process may be used to discover new ways to serve its members and the community. By continually searching for new ways to add value for the Society and the community, the organization can survive and prosper in a continually changing environment. A strategic planning process represents an opportunity to blend the old and the new, and enhance the ability of the organization to record and interpret the history of the community it serves.

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Appendix A: Comparison of Study Organizations

	Slate Valley	Big Springs	LPNEHS
Staffing	FT Executive Director PT Educator PT Curator	PT Curator	PT Executive Director
Volunteers	Appx. 20	Appx. 12	Appx. 10
Functions	Museum School Programs Special Programs Outreach Programs	Museum School Programs Special Programs	Museum Special Programs
Budget	\$110,000	\$12,000	\$30,000
Governance	13 Member Board	13 Member Board	15 Member Board

LPNEHS: Lake Placid/North Elba Historical Society

FT: Full Time

PT: Part Time

Appendix B

Five Steps to Develop a Strategic Plan

STEP 1 Get Organized



- Note why you are planning and any concerns
- Select a steering group or person to keep the planning on track
- Determine if outside help is needed
- Outline the planning process that fits your organization
- Get commitment to proceed

STEP 2 Take Stock (Situation Analysis)



- Pull together necessary background information
- Review your nonprofit's past, present, and future situation
- Identify key issues or choices

STEP 3 Set Direction



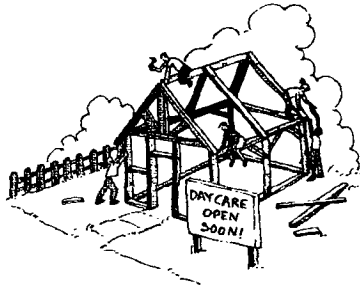
- Develop a vision of your organization's future
 - Critical issues approach
 - Scenario approach
 - Goals approach
 - Alignment approach
- Determine how to move the organization toward this future
- Develop a first draft of the plan

STEP 4 Refine and Adopt the Plan



- Review and refine the plan
- Adopt the plan

STEP 5 Implement the Plan



- Implement the plan
- Monitor progress
- Make adjustments
- Periodically update the plan

Appendix C

The Planning Pyramid



The strategic planning process can be thought of as a pyramid, where each of the content/process elements support those above them.

An organization's **mission** supports its **vision**. These two elements need to work in creative tension with each other -- that is, the vision should be large enough so that the mission is always being stretched positively to achieve it.

Goals support an organization's mission and vision. A small number of goals that address the most critical issues facing the organization is ideal. Too many goals and the strategic nature of the process is lost.

Strategies are those activities that will achieve goals when undertaken in a systematic way over a period of time. Strategies need to be broken down into their component parts (or **tasks**), assigned to individuals, committees, or work groups, and given timeframes for their completion.

Tasks become the annual work plan or implementation plan for the organization.

Plans often fail because they don't address the task level of detail. However, it is the identification of tasks that forms the all-important base of the pyramid.

ANNE W. ACKERSON

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Appendix D: Letters Sent to Study Organizations

Peter F. Roland, Jr.
22 Hillcrest Avenue
Lake Placid, NY 12946
518-523-9243
e-mail: hproland@northnet.org

February 23, 2003

Ms. Mary Lou Willits, Director
Slate Valley Museum
17 Water Street
Granville, NY 12832

Dear Mary Lou:

In preparing for our meeting on Tuesday morning, it seems that providing you with a list of questions in advance will facilitate our discussion. I met with Anne Ackerson last week, and as a result of that meeting and reading the literature on Strategic Planning I have developed some broad criteria which I hope to use in evaluating planning processes that have been undertaken by other organizations. For “thought starters” these are:

Evidence of a thoughtful approach to the process. This would include timeframe, who was involved, who “championed” the process, methods used for achieving the process elements.

Outside input. From who and how was it solicited? Was this input used to inform the process?

Discussion. That planning documents are informed by thoughtful discussion of issues.

Vision/Mission/Goals. Do all of these tie into each other on multiple levels? Are the ideas and language reinforced throughout the documents?

Prioritization of goals and strategies. Does the plan arrange these based on prioritization?

Annual work plan. Was this developed? How has it been used? Are there mechanisms included in the plan for its ongoing evaluation and updating?

Based on my reading of the material you sent it appears that many, if not all, of these actions have been taken. I would be interested in your observations on these criteria and if there are any critical elements or aspects of the process I may have overlooked.

After reviewing your documents I also had some more specific questions, some of which relate to or support the criteria above:

On 6/16/01 you developed a list of “considerations” from Board and Staff, prior to the 6/25/01 meeting. How were these developed? Why?

You focused on 6 functional areas for goals, 4 of which eventually were included in the plan. Were these based on an existing committee structure within the organization?

In your second meeting on 7/10/01 you drafted a Vision Statement and revised a Mission Statement in relation to the Vision Statement. Did this Mission Statement already exist?

Your third session was on 8/13/01 and your document was adopted on 12/11/01. There had to have been a considerable effort expended in the interim to put the results of your three meetings into a workable form. How was this work undertaken, and by who?

The workplans are impressive! Who was responsible for developing these?

My Masters program is in the area of Service Management, and we spend a lot of time considering the “deliverables” that can result from any process. Some can be quantified, some can’t, but all are considered in evaluating the success of any process improvement.

The deliverables I have been able to identify from a Strategic Planning process are: Board Development, Strengthening of organizational structure, Staffing, Funding, Membership, Collections policy, and Program Development. I would be interested in your thoughts on what impact the process your organization undertook had on these areas, and any others that I may have overlooked.

I would also be most interested in any general observations you might have on the causes of success or failure in undertaking a strategic planning process and implementing a plan, and anything else you think I might find helpful.

I know this is a big list!!! By providing it to you in advance I thought you might have a chance to reflect on some of these areas and we could have the most productive meeting possible. I will look forward to meeting with you on Tuesday morning at 10:00.

Sincerely,

Peter F. Roland, Jr.

Peter F. Roland, Jr.
 22 Hillcrest Avenue
 Lake Placid, NY 12946
 518-523-9243
 e-mail: hproland@northnet.org

February 27, 2003

Ms. Jean Guthrie
 Big Springs Historical Society
 P.O. Box 41
 Caledonia, NY 14423

Dear Jean:

Due to my class schedule this semester, it is unlikely that I will be able to visit your facility before I return to RIT for classes in the first two weeks of June. Since I will be starting some of the writing for my thesis shortly, I am hoping that I might be able to speak with you over the phone to ask some questions regarding your planning process. I thought giving you an idea in advance of some of the areas I am interested in might facilitate our discussion.

First, I need to find out some information about your organization in order to compare it to others in the study group, including the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society. These include:

Operating Budget?	Number of Visitors per year (if known)?
Hours/Days of Operation of your Facility?	Admission Charge?
Number of Volunteers utilized in operating?	When was the Society started?
Number of members of the Board?	

I met with Anne Ackerson last week, and as a result of that meeting and reading the literature on Strategic Planning I have developed some broad criteria which I hope to use in evaluating planning processes that have been undertaken by other organizations. For “thought starters” these are:

Evidence of a thoughtful approach to the process. This would include scope and timeframe, who was involved, who “championed” the process, methods used for achieving the process elements.

Outside input. From who and how was it solicited? Was this input used to inform the process?

Discussion. That planning documents are informed by thoughtful discussion of issues.

Vision/Mission/Goals. Do all of these tie into each other on multiple levels? Are the ideas and language reinforced throughout the documents?

Prioritization of goals and strategies. Does the plan arrange these based on prioritization?

Annual work plan. Was this developed? How has it been used? Are there mechanisms included in the plan for its ongoing evaluation and updating?

Based on my reading of the material you sent it appears that many, if not all, of these actions have been taken. I would be interested in your observations on these criteria and if there are any critical elements or aspects of the process I may have overlooked.

After reviewing your documents I also had some more specific questions, some of which relate to or support the criteria above:

Anne's original report was from August, 1998. You indicated in your notice to the Board of the 2/20/99 meeting that it might be Anne's last visit. How many meetings did you have with her, and with the full Board (perhaps not including Anne)?

In your 2/14/99 memo referenced above you stated that you are "committed to creating a plan" As President of the Board, you clearly were a "champion" of the process. Were there other Board members involved from the beginning? Was there a "Planning Committee" composed of Board members that kept the process moving? In your opinion, was the level of "buy-in" from the Board sufficient to make the process meaningful and successful?

You focused on 3 main areas in the Visioning exercise. Were these based on an existing committee structure within the organization? Likewise, do the 4 main Goal areas identified in your Action Plan (Audiences, Collections, Physical Plant, Growth & Resources) reflect an existing committee structure? Or alternately, did the Plan drive the establishment of committees to work on implementation of the strategies and tasks included in the Plan?

Did a Mission Statement for the Society exist prior to starting the process?

I really liked the Vision-Mission-Goals worksheet. Was this supplied by Anne, and was it provided to members of the Board *in advance* of the first meeting?

The Action Plan is very detailed, and must have required a considerable effort to put the results of your meetings into a workable form. How was this work undertaken, and by who?

Were the Action Plan templates provided by Anne, or something you created?

I was impressed that the Action Plans went through three years, in varying detail. Have these been followed through on?

The Job Description for Council Members seems like a great idea. Has it been effective?

My Masters program is in the area of Service Management, and we spend a lot of time considering the “deliverables” that can result from any process. Some can be quantified, some can’t, but all are considered in evaluating the success of any process improvement.

Some deliverables I have been able to identify from a Strategic Planning process are: Board Development, Strengthening of organizational structure, Staffing, Funding, Membership, Collections policy, and Program Development. I would be interested in your thoughts on what impact the process your organization undertook had on these areas, and any others that I may have overlooked.

I would also be most interested in any general observations you might have on the causes of success or failure in undertaking a strategic planning process and implementing a plan, and anything else you think I might find helpful.

I know this is a big list!!! By providing it to you in advance I thought you might have a chance to reflect on some of these areas and we could have the most productive discussion possible. *Please let me know by phone or e-mail when it might be possible for me to give you a call to discuss these areas.* Based on my class schedule Tuesdays and Thursdays are most flexible for me, but I would like to do it when it is most convenient for you. I sincerely appreciate your assistance with this project, and will look forward to meeting you in June!

Sincerely,

Peter F. Roland, Jr.

Appendix E: Sample of Slate Valley Museum Workplan

Slate Valley Museum Foundation Strategic Plan 2002-2005 2002-2003 Workplan

Key Area: Physical Plant

Goal 1: To ensure that the buildings and grounds attractively provide the best access to the public and meet professionally accepted standards for collection care.

Strategy 1: Develop flexible and efficient exhibition and program space inside the museum building.

Oversight: Programs and Exhibits and Physical Plant Committee

ACTION TASKS

TASKS	RESOURCES	TIME FRAME	COST/ FUNDING OPTIONS	MEASUREMENT STANDARD	PARTNERS	IMPACT
Design office & storage spaces in the new wing	Director David Wright	January	volunteer	Drawings, measurements	NA	Move forward with interior surfaces, defines program space
Conservator advises on storage environmental equipment and re-installation of mural	Director Matt Hicks David Wright Contractor Conservator	January	\$300 from building fund	Resource list for HVAC and lighting Estimates from contractor	NA	Move forward with HVAC specs, lighting specs, mural conservation
Schedule meeting with floor designer	Director Matt Hicks	January	volunteer	Preliminary floor designs for program room	NA	Move forward with interior surfaces
Ask for Curtis Lumber donation of material to cover mural temporarily	Director	February	donation	Material in hand	NA	Jackson paintings can be mounted

Appendix F: Sample of Big Springs Action Plan

Big Springs Historical Society
Caledonia, New York

Action Plan: April - December, 2000

Vision Statement

The Big Springs Historical Society is a dynamic, community responsive, educational organization that connects the importance of local history and heritage to contemporary life.

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Big Springs Historical Society is to promote an appreciation of local history, heritage, and culture. Through discovery, collection, interpretation and preservation of relevant materials, this society shall seek to convey an understanding of the identity of the Caledonia-Mumford community and its connection to the surrounding area, state, nation, and world.

Goal I. *To develop new audiences with engaging programming that connects the importance of local history and heritage to contemporary life.*

Month	Action Item	Person/Committee Responsible	Follow-up Required
April, 2000	Public Program: Train exhibit and program		
	Seek volunteers to plan a "community album" called the Millennium Wall	Eileen Ayers, Alhart family, Jean Harrigan, Marge Carpenter, Karen Wheeler	
	Seek assistance with the writing and production of a new historical society brochure	Jean, current newsletter editor	
	Council discussion about program focus for the year: continue A-A research and explore a related publication; farming; women's history	Jean, Council	
	In late spring/over summer, develop a roster of public programs for Fall, 2000 - Spring 2001, and publicize them		
	Continue school programming	Mary/volunteers	
	Decide on feasibility of traveling the A-A exhibit (perhaps parts can travel to local venues), and additional research	Jean/Council	