

THE  
PROFESSIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
STRENGTHENING  
PROJECT

**MODULE 3**

# Strategic Planning

***survive & thrive***

professional associations, private sector and global health scholars  
saving mothers, newborns and children

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### Where to find the complete the Professional Association Strengthening manual:

The complete set of Professional Association Strengthening modules can be downloaded for no fee at: [www.StrongProfAssoc.org](http://www.StrongProfAssoc.org).

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# Strategic Planning

Professional associations (PAs), like other charitable and non-profit organizations, may spend much time reacting to crises rather than managing their own paths. They may react to urgent needs in order to see quick results. Though it is difficult sometimes for PA managers to begin by looking at the larger picture and then discuss how to get there, the time spent on strategic planning (SP) is an investment that reaps benefits throughout the implementation period.

This module addresses the meaning and importance of the strategic planning process for a PA of health care professionals and outlines a process that can be used to conduct strategic planning. It includes tools, sample formats, and resources that PAs can use to conduct effective, strategic planning processes.

## Objectives

- To build an understanding of strategic planning.
- To discuss the individual components of strategic planning.
- To outline the process of strategic planning and provide access to tools and resources.
- To discuss the post planning process and provide tips to keep it dynamic.

## What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is the process used to determine what an organization wants to accomplish and to establish direction, strategies, and resources to reach those goals. Strategic planning is about making future, directional, and fundamental decisions and is less about operational decisions about day-to-day implementation. The decisions made at the strategic level include big picture goals, the segments the organization will serve, the organization's role in the community, key programs and/or services, resources, and how all

these factors will come together to achieve the organization achieve its mission.



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For a PA focused on the care of women and newborns, goals may include support of members to deliver the best health care possible, provision of educational materials for women and families served, and overall improvement in women's health. The segments served may include members, women and childbearing families, and other women's health care provider associations. The role of the PA in the community may include advocacy, education, and research to contribute to larger goals, such as reducing rates of maternal and newborn mortality. Key programs may include development and distribution of guidelines, position papers, trainings, continued medical education, and mentoring. Resources may include membership fees, corporate social responsibility contributions, grants, and in-kind support from members.

Professional associations may also extend SP to include mechanisms that guide the implementation of identified strategies, and the approach to SP may be adapted depending on the size and age of the PA and resources available.

Smaller PAs may need to use entrepreneurial approaches due to their limited scope of operations and available resources whereas larger PAs may use more structured approaches.

## Why is it Important to Develop a Strategic Plan?

Many PAs may jump straight into implementation activities because of resource limitations or the inability to devote time and priority to planning. While this may seem feasible in the short term, the absence of strategic planning hampers the organizational growth in the long term.

A strategic plan is important for the following reasons:

- **Provides a roadmap.** The strategic plan acts as a ready reference to keep everyone in the organization on track towards meeting the mission and goals of the organization.
- **Maximizes opportunities and minimizes risks.** The strategic plan helps to anticipate opportunities and challenges to change the working mode from reactive to proactive.
- **Increases stakeholder engagement.** The process of developing a strategic plan involves inviting all stakeholders to contribute. The availability of a well-crafted strategic plan allows existing and new stakeholders to clearly understand the organization and help them see their roles clearly.
- **Facilitates alignment within the PA.** The strategic plan begins with defining the vision, mission, and goals of an organization and extends beyond to include program description, implementation strategies, and a framework for evaluation. It helps to align various parts of the organization.
- **Helps to set priorities.** The strategic plan helps a PA focus on activities that are critical to achieving its overall mission, vision, and goals.
- **Increases effectiveness and impact.** The strategic plan helps a PA to find creative solutions and optimize resource utilization.

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### EXAMPLE

One of the Health PAs of Africa, as part of the big internationally funded project, developed their Strategy Plan to achieve the overall goal of better maternal and newborn health amongst low income communities in the country. The Strategic Plan helped the PA to understand its strengths, capacity building needs, process of creating impact and ground level activities needed. It led to a more structured and effective way of achieving the PA's overall goal.

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## What Are The Components of a Strategic Plan?

The strategic plan is a comprehensive document that helps to broadly define the PA from the long term vision to the tactical aspects employed by organization. The key components of the strategic plan may be customized to suit the need of the PA:

### **Organization Description**

The description of the organization usually includes the name, legal registration, years of existence, membership base, and core competence areas.

### **Mission**

Mission talks about the present and answers the question – “What do we do?” Diffen provides useful information about the difference between mission and vision.<sup>1</sup>

### **Values**

Values are guiding principles that help a PA choose. While they are present in all organizations, they are usually not articulated in smaller PAs. It is important that a common set of values is agreed and articulated that serves as a binding factor in the organization.

### **Vision**

Vision describes that future of the PA and to answer the question – “Where do we aim to be?”

## **Program Goals and Strategies**

Goals are the targets or objectives that a PA is set out to achieve. They are usually defined as short term (6 months or 12 months) and long term (12-36 months). Programs are the structured activities that help achieve the goals and objectives of a PA. A well-developed strategic plan can help a PA identify how each sub activity is a part of a key program, which organizational goal it feeds into, and how it contributes to achieving the overall mission and vision.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

The monitoring and evaluation framework is an important part of a strategic plan. This framework helps to provide an overall control mechanism and to answer key questions such as the following:

- What is to be monitored/evaluated?
- How will it be monitored/evaluated?
- When will it be monitored/evaluated?
- Who will do the monitoring/evaluation?
- Who needs the information obtained?
- How will it be reported?

A well thought out monitoring and evaluation framework can go a long way to help design program strategies, objectives, and activities.<sup>2</sup> The most popular types of monitoring and evaluation frameworks are conceptual, results, and logic frameworks.<sup>2</sup>

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### **EXAMPLES**

- The American Nurses Association uses a conceptual framework to monitor and evaluate the contribution of nurses to care coordination ([www.nursingworld.org/Framework-for-Measuring-Nurses-Contributions-to-Care-Coordination](http://www.nursingworld.org/Framework-for-Measuring-Nurses-Contributions-to-Care-Coordination)).
  - International Confederation of Midwives has used a results based framework to guide and monitor the delivery of Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal and Newborn Health (SRMNAH) services by midwives. ([www.internationalmidwives.org/assets/uploads/documents/Manuals%20and%20Guidelines/MSF%20for%20field-testing,%2017Mar15.pdf](http://www.internationalmidwives.org/assets/uploads/documents/Manuals%20and%20Guidelines/MSF%20for%20field-testing,%2017Mar15.pdf).)
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Professional associations should remember that different donors/external organizations sometimes use different monitoring and evaluation frameworks in which different aspects are customized according to individual needs. Organizations should use the frameworks that best suit their programs and activities and that also work for their external stakeholders.

The monitoring and evaluation framework should be accompanied by a monitoring and evaluation plan that will define how output/outcome information from the programs will be tracked. Such a plan should be created as part of the planning phase since retro-fitting the plan might not be effective. Consider resources required, organizational capacity, and timelines before developing a monitoring and evaluation plan.

The Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls provides further information regarding monitoring and evaluation frameworks.<sup>2</sup> The Health Compass website provides information about how to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan.<sup>3</sup>

## **Supportive Sub-Plans as Part of the Strategic Plan**

A strategic plan usually includes supportive plans, commonly known as sub-plans. These plans are operational plans that are part of the main strategic plan. However, they are derived from the strategic plan and are meaningless without it.

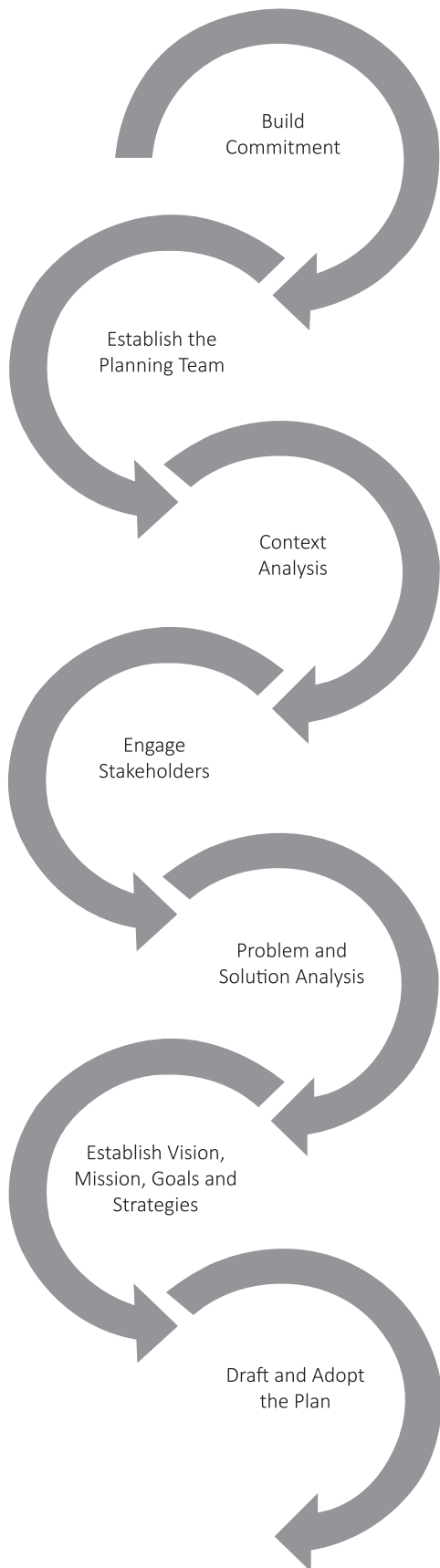
### **Sub-Plan 1: Activity and Resource Schedule**

This clearly describes the activities the PA will need to perform to meet its goals and overall vision. It indicates the order in which these activities will be conducted, the timelines for completion, and the resources required for each activity.

### **Sub-Plan 2: Staffing Plan**

This clearly describes the staff roles in a PA, how many people will be needed for each role in a given year, the hiring schedule, and the compensation structure.

**Figure 1.** Strategic planning process.



### ***Sub-Plan 3: Operating Budgets***

This clearly describes the monetary resources needed to finance the PA's activities and how these resources will be used.

### ***Sub-Plan 4: Resource Mobilization***

This provides comprehensive view of from where the funds will come, when they will be needed, and who will be responsible for each revenue stream. For further details, refer to Module 8: Resource Mobilization.

### ***Sub Plan 5: Communication Plan***

This outlines the communication needs of the PA and discusses key questions:

- What needs to be communicated?
- To whom will it be communicated?
- How will it be communicated?

While all health PAs might not have a well drafted communication plan, some health PAs, like the American Medical Association, constitute Communication Committees, to ensure that updates on PAs activities are disseminated amongst its stakeholders in an effective way. Some others create communication sub plans that guide their communication efforts.

## **What is the Process for Creating a Strategic Plan?**

Strategic planning is a process of engagement that is not completed in a meeting of only PA officers. In order for the SP process be successful, many voices must be heard before a plan is finalized. The following steps will help a PA understand how the SP process starts well before the actual writing of the plan. While going through this process it is important to focus on the important and big picture questions, adapt the process, choose the applicable steps, and produce a viable strategic plan.

### ***Step 1: Build Commitment from Key Leadership***

The first step in the SP process is for the officers, executive committee, and key leaders to decide that it is necessary complete a SP exercise. This decision ensures accountability and commitment from senior leadership and management. It is very important to build the commitment of the officers

and executive committee through discussion of the benefits and challenges of a SP exercise. A rough process plan could be presented and discussed to create excitement about SP.

### ***Step 2: Establish the Planning Team***

The next step is to create a layout of the SP process. To do so, a PA needs to form a steering group that will drive the SP exercise. At this point the PA can decide whether external resources or consultants are needed. The time and agenda for the steering group meetings are decided on in advance.

### ***Step 3: Context Analysis***

Once the decision has been made to initiate SP, the PA needs to understand the environment in which it is operating. This context analysis should be done for the internal and external contexts of the PA. Using this analysis, the PA increases its understanding of current trends, developments, opportunities, and possible challenges. It also helps the PA understand its own strengths and weaknesses.

Context analysis helps a PA understand organisations that are doing similar work. These organizations can pose competitive threats by accessing the same resources and opportunities, or they can offer best practices from which to learn. A sample content analysis template is provided online.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Step 4: Stakeholder Engagement***

Engaging stakeholders is one of the most important steps in the SP process. While larger PAs may be well aware of the various stakeholders with whom they interact, smaller PAs might want to invest some time to list direct and indirect stakeholders. Representatives from all stakeholder groups should be included in the SP process and their feedback and their comments should be recorded.

An e-mail questionnaire that can be used to engage stakeholders in the strategic planning process is provided in Tool 1.

### ***Step 5: Problem and Solution Analysis***

Problem and solution analysis helps a PA to answer the most basic but most critical question: Why are we doing what we are doing? This analysis is used to identify the key problem that the PA is trying to solve, helps the PA break down the core problem into its constituent causes

and effects, and helps to generate solutions that eventually become program strategies for the PA.

The Evaluation Toolbox provides useful information on how to conduct a problem and solution analysis.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Step 6: Establish Vision, Mission, Goals, and Strategies***

Once the background analysis for the PA is completed and documented, the PA establishes the vision, mission, goals and activities/tasks, strategies, timelines, and staff in charge. Ideally the strategic plan should be well documented and accessible to members and staff of the PA. The PA can also post a summarized version of the strategic plan on its website to inform the external world about its strategic priorities in the coming years.

### ***Step 7: Drafting and Adopting the Plan***

The final step is to adopt and proceed with the established strategies. Two factors help to ensure that the proposed plan is adopted:

- Address issues important to implementation.
- Build consensus from stakeholders on how to approach the strategic plan.

Professional associations should remember that formal adoption of the strategic plan may take months, and commitment to mission, values, goals, strategies, and obligations is highly important for adoption. Further, PAs should create a draft of the plan and circulate it amongst the stakeholders. There is no perfect way to write the strategic plan, but the following factors should be considered:

- Keep the reader in mind and write what you want people to read. A lengthy document might be read by fewer people.
- Include a glossary to explain terms that are technical or specific to your PA.
- Make the document plan look professional.
- Ensure that the document serves the needs of internal and external stakeholders, such as funders or the government.
- The final strategic plan document must be approved by the board, but drafts can be circulated amongst stakeholders for comments.

Guidelines provided by the Free Management Library can be useful in drafting a strategic plan.<sup>6</sup>

## How to Keep a Strategic Plan Alive

Any plan becomes irrelevant if it is not reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis. If proposed goals cannot be met, modify the plan to reflect the changed scenario. A PA can implement the following suggestions to ensure that the strategic plan remains viable:

- Review the plan periodically. The PA should decide when the periodic review should be done. Generally a quarterly review is considered sufficient, but this should be determined depending on scope of operations, size, etc.
  - A periodic review involves assessment of the actual against the planned outcomes and discussion of reasons for deviation. The periodic review could also be a platform for the team to discuss any implementation challenges. A sample process for a review meeting is provided in Tool 3.
- Update the plan regularly so that it remains relevant. A follow up to the periodic review is to update the strategic plan to reflect any changes that might have occurred in the review period. It is possible that priorities for goals may change. This is fine as long as the plan is updated in a timely manner.
- Build team ownership for the plan. Team ownership is extremely important; without it, the strategic planning exercise is likely to lose momentum. Making different people owners of different pieces of the plan is a good strategy to build ownership.

## How to Track Progress Against the Strategic Plan

It is important to track progress against the strategic plan to assess whether activities are going in the right direction and are contributing to the achievement of the overall mission. Sometimes, it is easy for organizations to slip into implementation mode and forget the overall picture. This can lead to distraction from the mission and misappropriation of resources. Tracking helps a PA to know the existence

and extent of deviation and provides an opportunity to take timely, corrective action.

While frequency of progress evaluation varies from organization to organization, it is suggested that this time be as short as possible. Usually weekly tracking (for PAs with frequent activities) and monthly tracking (for PAs with less frequent activities) are recommended.

A PA should identify a leader to lead the SP process, and tracking could be done by this individual. Tracking can also be done by individual program teams and data can be collated by a process leader. To diffuse leadership, the PA could rotate the tracking responsibility amongst different staff members.

A sample tracking sheet for goals is provided in Tool 4.

## Role of a Strategic Planning Consultant

A PA may consider hiring a strategic planning consultant to assist with the various parts of the SP process:

- Design
- Stakeholder engagement
- Context and problem analysis
- Documentation and publication
- Review and tracking

For small PAs, the strategic planning consultant could be hired on a retainer basis since staff members with relevant expertise might be difficult to find. However, in larger PAs, the consultant might be hired for a specific position in which she/he would build the SP capacities of the PA.



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## Tool 1: E-Mail Questionnaire for Stakeholders

The following questionnaire may be used with members of the PA or other, interested stakeholders. It will be given prior to the start of strategic planning.

We are very excited about this strategy exercise as it gives us a chance to reconnect with our friends, supporters, former team members, mentors, and partners. We welcome your thoughts and out of the box ideas about our past, present, and future based on what you already know about our work without having to do any additional research. As per our pilot test of the survey, it will take approximately 40 minutes to complete. We have included multiple choice and open questions. Your feedback will be a mirror and a lighthouse for us.

### Vision: The Change We Want To See

#### 1. What in your opinion is our long term vision?

1. Description 1
2. Description 2
3. Description 3
4. Description 4

#### 2. What key challenge(s)/need(s) are we addressing? (up to 3 choices)

1. Challenge 1
2. Challenge 2
3. Challenge 3
4. Challenge 4

Comments on vision:

### Mission: Our Unique Approach

#### 3. Which programs/activities of ours do you know about/have heard most about?

Comments on approach:

#### 4. What do you see as our core strength, our competitive advantage, that makes us stand out from organizations doing similar work in the city/country/ world? (up to 3 choices)

1. Strength 1
2. Strength 2
3. Strength 3
4. Strength 4
5. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5. Our current work model is: \_\_\_\_\_. How effective has this model been as a whole in pursuing our vision? (one choice + why)

1. Very effective
2. Effective
3. Good in theory but not implemented effectively
4. Not good in theory, needs to be reviewed
5. Why: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments on work model:

## Tool 1: E-Mail Questionnaire for Stakeholders (continued)

### Success & Impact: The Change We Are Actually Creating

**6. We measure the success of our programs and activities through certain indicators. In each of the following, how have we performed? (1 being the lowest performance/no performance and 4 being best performance).**

1. Indicator 1
2. Indicator 2
3. Indicator 3
4. Indicator 4
5. Any other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. What factors could have made this possible (internal or external)? (up to 2 choices)**

1. Professional and committed staff
2. Support from funders
3. Collaborating with partner organizations on joint projects
4. The right strategy
5. Addressing the right need at the right time
6. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. How important are the following approaches in effectively communicating our work and impact externally? Please rank from high (1) to low (6) priority.**

1. A easier to use website (\_\_\_)
2. Being more physically present among target group (college fests, networks, events etc) (\_\_\_)
3. Effective use of social media (\_\_\_)
4. Brochures & flyers (\_\_\_)
5. Regular newsletters (\_\_\_)
6. Any other: \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_)
7. Addressing the right need at the right time
8. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments on success and impact:

**Tool 1: E-Mail Questionnaire for Stakeholders (continued)**

**Future Strategy: Our Road Map For Next 3-5 Years**

**9. Thinking about the future, what kind of projects/activities do you see us doing?**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_

**10. What indicators of success should we set for ourselves?**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Different organizations follow different expansion/growth models, for example, increasing staff, setting up branches, becoming a network, working with partner organizations, etc. What should our models of growth be for the next 5 years?**

**12. To help us implement our emergent strategy effectively, are there any organizations/networks/donors that you think we could partner with?**

	Comments on future strategy:
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Thank you for your time, feedback and ideas. This input will form a crucial part of our strategy exercise!

## **Tool 2: Stakeholder (Internal & External) Workshop Format**

### **10:00 Ready, set, go**

Introductions, contribution and expectations, agenda review, stakeholder survey update

### **10:45: Our story: What have we achieved so far? What has made it possible?**

Mapping key milestones, successes, stakeholders, and enabling factors

### **11:45 Break**

### **12:00 Our identity: Who we are & who we want to be**

Defining PA's identity, core values and competitive advantage

### **13:00 Lunch**

### **13:30 Our vision & impact: What change do we want to see?**

Review PA's vision and define success benchmarks/indicators

### **15:00 Break**

### **15:15 Our mission: How do we achieve our vision, impact?**

Create coherent work model aligned to vision, values, and competitive advantage

### **16:30 Break**

### **16:45 Our goal posts: What do we want to achieve in the next 3 years?**

Draft strategic objectives for the next 3 years for programs, organization management, people development, and financial stewardship

### **17:45 Our experience today and our commitments**

Share feedback, inspiration, and learning from the day; next steps

### **18:00 End of the day**

### ***Tool 3: Process for a Review Meeting***

Note: Please remember that meetings are not unproductive and pointless. They can help us make our work more effective.

#### **Prior to the meeting,**

1. **Fix the date and time.** If the review meeting is monthly or quarterly, the dates and times for the whole year can be fixed in advance.
2. **Block calendars.** Inform the meeting members about the dates and times. Circulate the agenda for the next meeting

#### **When in the meeting,**

3. **Analyse actual performance.** Respective teams can make presentations on the performance
4. **Compare performance with plan.** Actual performance will be compared with the plan regarding the major milestones that were initially defined for the relevant period.
5. **Review long term goals.** These may not change in every review meeting. Smaller/younger PAs might need to rework their strategies often to arrive at the one that works.
6. **Discuss issues to process.** Keep this an open ended discussion to help members raise issues. This will help to generate new ideas, build new perspectives, and promote ownership within the team.

### **Tool 4: Goal Tracking Sheet**

	<b>Description</b>	<b>Planned</b>	<b>Actual</b>
<b>1</b>	Success Indicator 1		
<b>2</b>	Success Indicator 2		
<b>3</b>	Success Indicator 3		
<b>4</b>	Success Indicator 4		
<b>5</b>	Success Indicator 5		
<b>6</b>	Success Indicator 6		
<b>7</b>	Success Indicator 7		
<b>8</b>	Success Indicator 8		
<b>9</b>	Success Indicator 9		
<b>10</b>	Success Indicator 10		