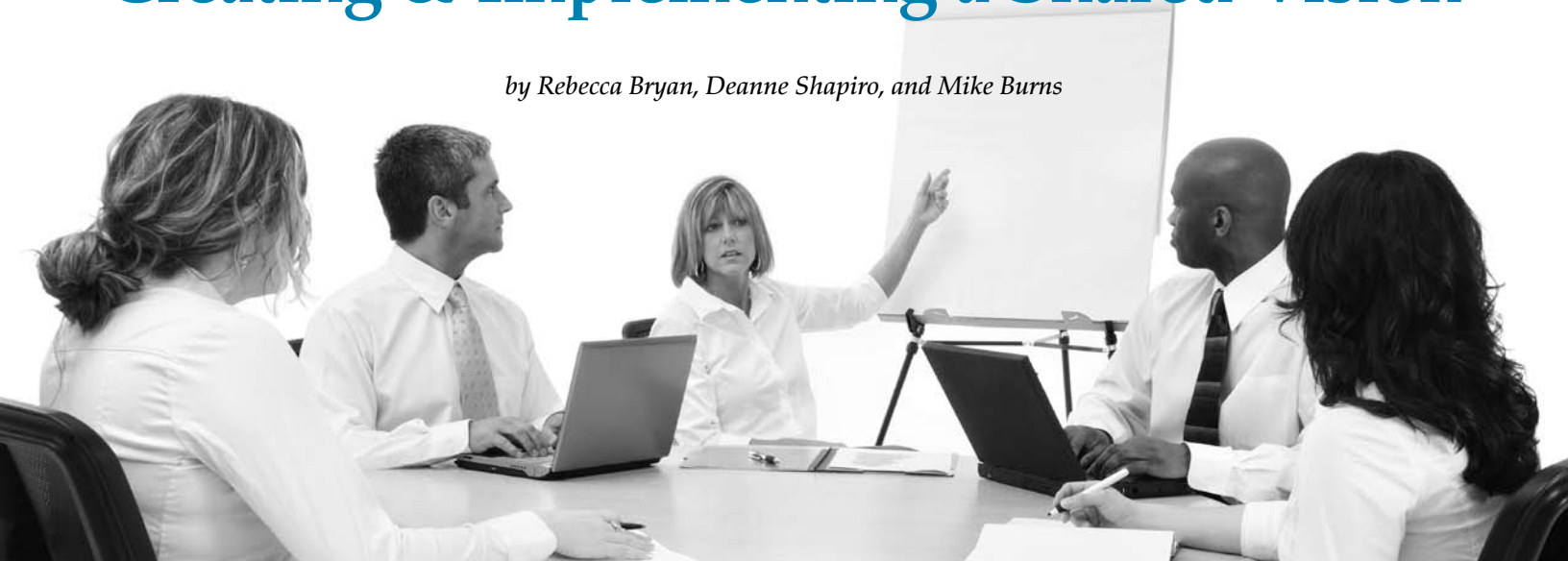


THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE IN Creating & Implementing a Shared Vision

by Rebecca Bryan, Deanne Shapiro, and Mike Burns



KEEPING IT SIMPLE, HONEST AND REAL

by Rebecca Bryan

Say the words, “strategic planning”, and many of us cringe. I often hear: “We spent a lot of money doing that a few years ago and it ended up sitting on a shelf” or “I can’t sit through one more board retreat where we get all revved up and then nothing changes.”

The process of strategic planning can be a change agent, a consensus builder, a distraction and even a deterrent. So what accounts for the difference? In all honesty, a lot of things do. However, all effective strategic plans share three things; simplicity, honesty and accountability.

A plan needs to be simple. A good strategic plan flows naturally; it provides a road map for change and it makes sense. The words are not fancy – they are meaningful. A good strategic plan takes a complex situation and makes it clear. The plan is realistic and it motivates people. It prioritizes goals and has just the right balance of detail and strategy. I recommend that a plan have three to five overarching objectives – that’s it. Out of those objectives come your yearly and quarterly goals and the work plan to support them. A plan should not reiterate all the things you do now and that you will continue to do. Rather, a strategic plan governs change with powerfully simple goals, goals that are real and that matter.

Central to the success of any strategic plan is honesty. The plan is not written to make everyone involved look good. It is not designed to impress funders. It is an honest appraisal of where an organization

is and what needs to change in the next 12 months. The board and staff who, together, create a shared plan through honest conversation and debate have a good chance of making that plan come true.

Effective strategic plans must also include accountability. Benchmarks are integrated into the plan that measure success (change). Human and financial resources necessary to implement the plan are stated. Board members and staff understand their roles. Expectations are established and checked in with on a regular basis. It is celebrated when benchmarks are achieved and sought to be understood when they are not. Board members and staff must hold themselves and each other accountable, as a team, to a simple and honest plan that results in real and lasting change.

Success, not perfection, comes out of these plans. Honest, simple and real.

ACHIEVING UNITY IN VISION

by Deanne Shapiro

Strategic planning provides an exciting and challenging opportunity to integrate the perspectives of diverse organizational stakeholders – e.g. Board, staff, clients/ consumers, community partners, funders/supporters – into a compelling articulation of the organization’s future vision and the critical action path needed

to achieve it. Part of the challenge, however, is in the successful integration of these perspectives, as these can be quite divergent, representing differing disciplines, organizational roles and responsibilities, levels and lengths of organizational involvement, and even diverse individual personalities.

Rather than struggling with or against the energy provided by these differences, it is far more productive to incorporate these disparate frames of reference into a shared vision of the organization’s “desired future”. This shared vision enables each contributor to the development of the vision to embrace and support it because it reflects the diversity of perspectives involved in its creation. But how to achieve such unity? One approach that has been successful in a broad range of nonprofit organizations focuses on including four fundamental “styles” or perspectives on the organization’s future, each of which raises a core question for strategic discussion and decision-making.

If you have taken any of the well-known personality style assessment “tests”, you are familiar with these four styles or perspectives, no matter what the particular assessment instrument calls them. As defined in many of these instruments, the four styles are the Expressive/Explorer, the Amiable/Nurturer, the Analytical/Troubleshooter, and the Driver/Pragmatist.

By integrating stakeholders’ perspectives about organizational resources, anticipated obstacles, and priority action areas, this comprehensive future vision moves the organization more rapidly into identifying the critical action path needed to achieve its desired future state.

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- The **Expressive or Explorer** focuses on “making it better” by looking from the “10,000 feet up in the air” big picture at the possibilities identifying opportunities for significant organizational transformation.
- The **Amiable or Nurturer** focuses on “making it inclusive” by valuing the input, needs, and concerns of each individual involved in the organization and incorporating all of the organization’s resources in its future direction.
- The **Analytical or Troubleshooter** focuses on “making it right” by raising issues and obstacles that could affect the organization’s desired future and by seeking to address these issues before committing to action.
- The **Driver or Pragmatist** focuses on “making it happen” by urging or initiating immediate action steps and short-term results that can be evaluated, modified, or redefined later on in the strategic planning process.

Each of these styles or perspectives provides a particular question to be answered in the course of strategic planning, as follows:

- Expressive/Explorer: What “**desired future**” do we want to create and support in the next few years? What positive changes should/must be part of this desired future?
- Amiable/Nurturer: What **human resources and other assets and strengths** can we leverage to achieve this desired future?
- Analytical/Troubleshooter: What **obstacles and challenges** do we need to overcome to achieve this desired future?
- Driver/Pragmatist: What **action areas and steps** should we focus on as our first priorities to achieve this desired future?

In responding to these questions, participants in the strategic planning process become collaborative partners in developing a compelling vision for the organization that goes well beyond the simple delineation of the organization’s future aspirations found in most vision statements. By integrating stakeholders’ perspectives about organizational resources, anticipated obstacles, and priority action areas, this comprehensive future vision moves the organization more rapidly into identifying the critical action path needed to achieve its desired future state.

At the same time, the fully developed vision also affirms differences in stakeholders’ styles, roles, and organizational vantage points as essential elements in the creation and successful realization of its’ “desired future”. The integration

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of these differences engages stakeholder support for this desired future, and helps align everyone in the organization with a fundamental reality – that if the organization is to achieve this future, it is critically important that we are all in this together.

FOCUSING ON RESULTS

by Mike Burns

The newly revised Federal 990 tax return includes questions about a nonprofit's governance. According to the IRS's Sarah Ingraham, the IRS has two interests. Specifically, the IRS seeks to understand how the board engages to manage risk and pursue mission. The IRS's thinking is: managing risk and pursuing mission are both central to fulfilling a board's fiduciary duties, of which there are three. The three fiduciary duties are the Duty of Care: oversight of resources both in and out; the Duty of Obedience: staying true to mission and vision; and the Duty of Loyalty: always putting the organization first.

Central to achieving its fiduciary duties, a nonprofit board maintains a vision statement that clearly identifies how the nonprofit, as well as the nonprofit's world, will "be" if or when its mission is achieved. A nonprofit's vision statement serves as the board's barometer for assessing the

level of impact the organization has on the world, asking "how much have we moved the needle in the direction we want?" Sharp vision statements also provide the foundation for a board's mission (what happens as a result of its work/what defines success), goals (the measurable outcomes) and strategy (the approach).

Periodically an effective nonprofit board takes time out to revisit and maintain a vision statement that is current, sharp and clear while also taking the opportunity to consider whether its mission, goals and strategies are appropriate to the times. And, because board membership, funding availability and other elements in the world do change, it is incumbent upon the board to ensure that its direction vision reflects these changes.

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Strategic planning is one activity that recognizes that the world periodically changes and visions, missions, goals and strategies, and sometimes even values, need to reflect these changes. Equally important, nonprofit board membership changes, and from experience we recognize that the board that

individually and collectively buys into the organization's vision etc. will be fully dedicated and engaged in doing what's necessary to ensure desired outcomes.

The Theory of Change is one exercise I have developed to help a board develop and express a collective agreement that can then be forged as a nonprofit's vision and mission.

There are four essential components to Theory of Change that can be framed as questions:

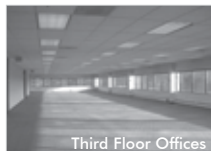
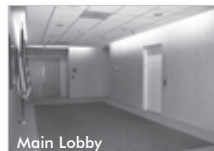
1. For you as an individual, what are your core beliefs and passions about the world and/or the circumstances you believe should be preserved or changed? Nonprofits can be as much about retaining something precious -

such as art, species or even values – as much as changing some condition. It is essential to note that your personal beliefs have been shaped by all of your experiences – educational, home, social, cultural, and spiritual to name a few. An understanding of your beliefs and assumptions about the world will help you understand if and how you fit within the rest of the board.

2. For your organization, who is your primary customer/client and what is it about this constituency that calls you to action? This conversation will be filled with discussions about your assumptions and beliefs. It is, of course, best if these assumptions could be informed by facts, as these facts will shape the feasibility of the next question.
3. What does the board collectively believe to be the most effective and practical approach that will produce the desired results? The Theory of Change intervention statement expresses how change can be accomplished at the macro level. This is the "cause and effect" conversation that postulates: if we do "this", then "that" will happen, with "that" circling back to the core beliefs about the state of the world and then going forward to the desired results.
4. What do you believe will result if your selected intervention is successful? Most importantly, will the results you describe in your answers produce the impact on the world and/or your selected constituency in accordance with your core beliefs and passions?

A half-to-full day planning session with some staff and board prep can help the board develop its Theory of Change

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and subsequently its vision, mission and values statements, which are the foundations for the remaining parts of the strategic plan and more importantly, the foundation for a board that is results-focused and accountable to itself and its constituents. ■

Rebecca Bryan has worked in the nonprofit sector for over 20 years and is the President of the consulting firm R Bryan Associates. She is an Adjunct Professor at Bay Path College in their graduate program for Nonprofit Management and Philanthropy. Rebecca is a board member for CT Association of Fundraising Professionals, is a member of the Planned Giving Group of CT and the Organizational Network. For more information, visit www.rbryanassociates.com.

Rebecca is also presenting a workshop through CT Nonprofits' Center for Professional Development. "Measuring Fundraising Effectiveness: Establishing Goals Beyond Dollars" will be held on Tuesday, August 17th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at CT Nonprofits' Hartford office. This workshop will explore why focusing only on dollars in fundraising is dangerous to your ultimate success, and will explore additional indicators of fundraising effectiveness and what each of them can offer to your development program. For more details and to register, visit www.ctnonprofits.org/education/offersings.

Deanne Shapiro is President of Life Skills Associates, a Connecticut training and consulting firm specializing in organizational development and effectiveness. Deanne has provided services to nonprofit organizations throughout New England in work force diversity, team building, conflict resolution, strategic planning, staff development, supervisory and management skills and board development. She can be reached at: DeanneShapiro@comcast.net.

Mike Burns is a partner in the firm of BWB Solutions, formerly, Brody · Weiser · Burns. He serves as a resource for nonprofits to identify and address governance and management issues and well as a researcher and facilitator to develop strategic, business and venture plans. He has 30 years of consulting experience; has written and edited several books and articles; and maintains a blog on nonprofit governance, management and fundraising. He is a board member of the Alliance for Nonprofit Management. For more information, visit www.bwbsolutions.com

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