



Guides for youth NGOs



STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, bring others along.” African proverb

WHAT IS STRATEGIC PLANNING?

Strategic planning is a tool for organisation development and a systematic process that helps an organisation identify the direction where to go.

Many youth organisations create plans for their work, but what makes a plan a **strategic plan**? A strategic plan has a **direction, long and short-term goals and a list of priorities** for at least the three coming years.



WHY SHOULD YOU HAVE A STRATEGIC PLAN?

One of the key factors to **achieve sustainability** in an organisation is having a strategic plan. An organisation is a living entity consisting of people who aim to reach a common goal. The organisation affects and is affected by the external environment. It is therefore essential to have a strategic plan in order to make sure that all the efforts of the people within the organisation are going in the **same direction**. This will help you to have a **greater impact** and to be **ready for the changes** in the environment. What other advantages can your organisation benefit from when having a strategic plan?

- Clear direction
- Shared vision
- Simplified decision-making
- Better communication

Clear direction

Youth organisations often suffer from high turnover rate with volunteers and employees coming and leaving regularly in an already fast changing environment. New people bring new ideas, which is very valuable, but at the same time it can result in a lack of direction and long-term goals in the organisation.

Strategic planning provides **direction and focus** to youth organisations. With a plan it is much easier to **identify the priorities** and people can then move from plan to action. There is still **space for new ideas** and initiatives, as long as they contribute to the achievement of the long-term goals.

Shared vision

Different people involved in a youth organisation have different understanding of it, the way it should function and the direction it should take. That is why it is important to have a strategic plan and to have the right people take part in the strategic planning process.

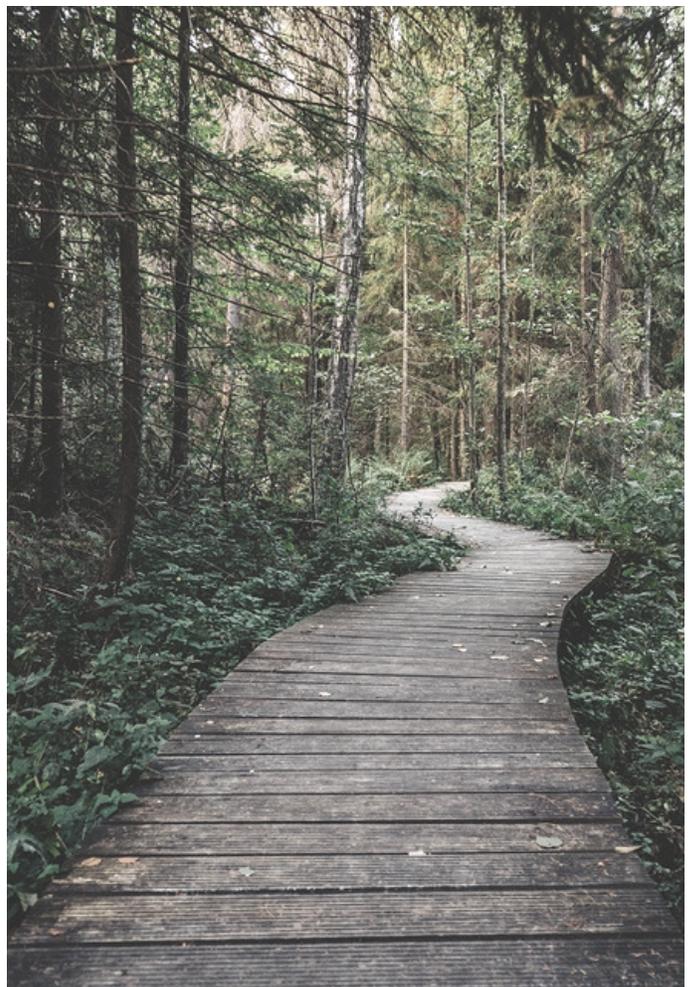
Strategic planning leads to **organisational alignment**, which means that everyone in the organisation is on the same page and will follow the same direction. Moreover, a strategic planning process shared with everyone involved in the organisation will contribute to **strengthening the existing values** of the organisation, to build a more harmonious and **stronger team** and to open a space for exchange of ideas.

Simplified decision-making

Management of a youth organisation and decision-making are much easier when you have a written strategic plan. **Priorities are easy to identify** and people **share and understand the decisions taken**.

Better communication

Having a strategic plan can help a youth organisation communicate its aim to potential funders, sponsors, partners and staff. They will gain a better understanding of the direction where your organisation is going and they will more likely support or join your activities. In larger, international or umbrella youth organisations, strategic planning can also help with the communication with members, volunteers and employees. **Aims, objectives and decisions taken can be communicated much more easily** if they are endorsed by the strategic plan.



HOW SHOULD YOU CREATE YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN?

Before your organisation embarks on the strategic planning process there are many aspects you should **take into account**:

- Is everyone in the organisation open to this process?
- Is everyone in the organisation eager to commit and be involved in the process?
- Do you have the right people within the organisation to lead the process?
- Are you ready to invest enough time?
- Do you have resources available and are you willing to allocate them in this process?

Once you make sure that people, time and resources are on your side, it is time to start the strategic planning of your organisation. The amount of years covered by a strategic plan differ from organisation to organisation. The most common **timeframe** for planning is three to five years. We suggest the following eight basic parts or **steps** for your strategic planning process:

1. Mission - Why do you exist?

Your mission defines the **purpose** of your organisation. It should be a timeless declaration of your aspiration and focus. It should include what you seek to achieve and the way you aim to achieve it.

2. Vision - Where do you want to be in five years?

Your vision statement defines how your organisation will look like in five or more years. A vision is different from a mission. A mission is the cause, what you want to accomplish. The vision is the **effect**, what you pursue in order to fulfil your mission.

3. Values - What do you believe in?

The organisation values are the **guiding principles** that people within the organisation stand for and believe in. Your values should be the positive, passionate and distinctive core beliefs of the organisation.



4. SWOT - Where are you now?

A SWOT analysis will help you identify your current position by finding out what your **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats** are. This tool can help your organisation assess its internal functioning and external environment in order to determine which is the most appropriate strategy to reach your vision.

5. Long-term strategic objectives - What will you focus on?

Once you identify the potential strategic areas with the help of the SWOT analysis, you need to choose the ones you want to focus on. These will be your long-term strategic objectives, in other words, the **priorities** your organisation will focus on in the next three or five years time. These objectives should lead you to achieve your vision.

6. Short-term objectives or goals - How will you achieve it?

The short-term objectives are the one-year goals that will contribute to achieve the long-term strategic objectives.

You can use the **SMART criteria** to set your short-term goals:

- **Specific** - Your goals should be concise and answer to the questions how, when, where and what you plan to achieve.
- **Measurable** - So you can track the progress and achievements.
- **Achievable** - Goals should be challenging but still remain possible to reach.
- **Relevant** - Make sure your goals are aligned with the priorities and long-term strategic objectives of your organisation.
- **Time-bound** - Your goals should include a time-frame in which they should be achieved.

7. Assessment of resources - What is it available?

Resources need to be assessed and allocated in order to achieve your objectives and goals.

What **financial resources, people, skills and expertise** are available in your organisation?

Place your assets in a **budget** to ensure that your strategic plan is feasible.

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8. Indicators - Monitor your progress

Monitoring and evaluation is a very important stage in your strategic plan. Make sure you set a **monitoring plan with indicators** to track the progress of your objectives and goals. Use the results of the monitoring to **make adjustments** in your objectives, strategies and activities if needed.

Remember that strategic planning is an ongoing process that does not finish once you have your written document. Your organisation will need to implement it, evaluate it and review it systematically.

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This guide was created in 2016 in the frame of the YEE project "Sustainability in NGOs"



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