

Strategic Planning in Western Grassroots Conservation Groups: Lessons from the Field

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TREC



*Training Resources for the
Environmental Community*

600 Agua Fria Street
Santa Fe, NM 87501
phone 505.986.8400
trec@treknw.org
www.treknw.org

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Reading This May Save Your Organizational Life

Have the words strategic planning been floating around your meetings for a while, as in, “We should probably be doing some strategic planning,” or “This funder wants to see a strategic plan before giving us more money,” or “Our board needs to know more about where we’re going and their role in getting us there,” or “I bet we could be working more effectively and winning more, if we could figure out how to do it”? Or perhaps your organization has done some planning and is ready to go to the next level.

Strategic Planning is a term much bandied about, meaning different things to different people and groups, and applied in a wide variety of ways. Over the past several years, TREC has supported and encouraged grassroots conservation groups in the West to use strategic planning as an essential tool for gaining focus and momentum for greater effectiveness in their work. In spring 2005, we interviewed nine conservation leaders and four strategic planning facilitators about their experiences with strategic planning. We’ve gathered here what we learned from these interviews as well as the lessons we’ve gathered from TREC’s eight years of experience working with grassroots conservation groups in the West on strategic planning.

What you’ll find here:

- Answers to the questions, “Why do strategic planning?” and “What’s in it for me and my organization?” straight from the experiences of conservation colleagues and facilitators.
- Information about the process, so you know what strategic planning entails.
- A refresher for groups doing another cycle of strategic planning to help you deepen or enhance your planning processes and plans.

What’s in it for Your Organization?

(“We don’t have time for all those meetings,” we hear you say.)

TREC likes the definition of strategic planning developed by Michael Allison and Jude Kaye in *Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations*:

A systematic process through which an organization agrees on – and builds commitment among key stakeholders to – priorities that are essential to its mission and are responsive to the environment [it operates in]. Strategic planning guides the acquisition and allocation of resources to achieve these priorities.

In other words, getting together the key people who make the organization what it is, then deciding where you want to go and how you’re going to get there in the context of the organization’s capabilities and the challenges it faces.

While one conservation organization board member has been quoted calling strategic planning “Bullshit in a three-ring binder,” the leaders we interviewed unanimously found it valuable. Some were surprised to see that the planning they did had even more impact on their results than they had imagined.

These days, given the increasing political and funding challenges for conservation groups, strategic planning makes more sense than ever. Organizations that set their direction thoughtfully

and execute it sensibly, learning as they go, are more apt to achieve success and receive support for their efforts. In brief, here are the benefits that conservation organizations are getting from strategic planning:

- **Creating focus:** The whole point of strategic planning is to make choices about where to focus the human and financial resources of the organization among all the extremely important and worthwhile things it could do. Conservation leaders we interviewed said that their strategic planning process brought clarity and agreement about programmatic focus. The strategic plan document then served as a framework for deciding what to take on or not address. Such a document makes it clear to everyone what the organization does and doesn't do and why. It enables groups to say "no" to certain activities, programs, or opportunities—something that can be immensely challenging and even gut wrenching—so they can stay focused. *"There's more coherence to who we are and what we're doing, particularly due to the strategic planning process, which involved everyone."* (Steve D'Esposito, Earthworks.) *"For an advocacy group in these challenging times, strategic planning is where you articulate what makes you different, where you create your identity."* (Rick Johnson, Idaho Conservation League.)
- **Getting things done:** Not surprisingly, conservation groups that develop strategic plans are successfully using them to permanently protect critical habitat. The planning process often suggested new strategies, including passing legislation, winning administrative rulings, raising funds, and gaining political clout. The plan helps staff and board members stay focused on what the organization is working to accomplish. As the basis for annual operating plans, individual work plans, campaign plans, and communication plans, a strategic plan becomes a major tool for keeping priorities straight, keeping an eye on the progress of the work, making adjustments to it, and evaluating success in order to keep improving. *"Our plan is almost entirely new thought. We introduced a bill in Congress. We wouldn't have been able to do it without the plan."* (Rick Johnson, Idaho Conservation League.)
- **Raising funds:** It's no surprise that individual donors and foundations appreciate strategic plans. Organizations with plans can show clear goals that provide benchmarks for accountability. We were surprised, though, to be told about individual donors who, upon seeing the strategic plan, increased their donation. In one case, a donor made a multiyear, five-figure commitment after reading the organization's strategic plan. *"There's no question about it ... planning is critical to achieving success. We've seen over time that the effort invested in strategic planning pays off in increased sense of purpose, focus, and effectiveness in protecting critical habitat."* (Tim Greyhavens, Wilburforce Foundation)
- **Making needed change:** Making changes in the way you operate and what you are trying to do seems to be key to conservation groups' success these days. Groups are making changes in response to the political and social world that they are operating in, changes in public attitudes about the environment, the need to relate to constituencies differently, develop new messages, and operate more productively. Some of these changes will require internal modifications in staffing, communication, structure, and so on. All these adjustments need to be planned carefully and carried out thoughtfully if the impact is to be more than mere disruption. *"Change happens. It's important to embrace change and that's part of what strategic planning is. We have to approach the process of organizational growth and development positively, even though it hurts."* (Peter Galvin, Center for Biological Diversity) *"Strategic planning is about making changes ... knowing our organization's strengths and weaknesses, figuring out where we want to be, building on our strengths."* (Kevin Harun, formerly of Alaska Conservation Foundation)

- **Orienting new staff and board members:** It's always challenging to quickly help new staff and board members get up to speed and positioned to work effectively for the organization. Conservation executive directors are using their strategic plans to give new board and staff members a clear road map of what the organization is doing and where it's going. With direction explained and goals clearly stated, new people can see how they fit into the overall picture and can jump on board productively.

"When I started my job, I was handed the strategic plan to read and understand what we're here to do. It helped me see how my work fits in the organization. Reading the plan gave me an orientation that otherwise would have taken a lot of time meeting with other program directors. I'm learning how important the strategic planning is to creating cohesiveness in our work and among the programs."

(Bryan Bird, Forest Guardians)

- **Boosting morale, momentum, and peace of mind:** Engaging in strategic planning is a positive and proactive step that empowers people and organizations. *"There's a motivational quality. The planning process gave the idea that we can grow and change. It countered the gloom and doom that people are feeling. Morale is much higher because people believe there is a process underway shaping their organization's future that they're participating in."* (Peter Galvin, Center for Biological Diversity) Having a plan creates a higher degree of confidence that the results are achievable. *"I'm still going crazy, but now I'm going crazy with a strategic plan. I don't grab it off the shelf every day, but having it makes it makes me much more willing to let go of what could be daily worries."* (John Horning, Forest Guardians)
- **Creating the organizational culture you want:** A participatory strategic planning process is a chance to set a new tone in an organization. By giving everyone who is key to the organization a voice, strategic planning helps people feel more ownership of the plan and find ways to work cooperatively to implement it. *"The strategic planning articulates the need for synergy – I wouldn't have thought about that without the plan."* (John Horning, Forest Guardians) *"Making a plan gives us an idea of where we want to go in achieving progress. Instead of focusing on defense we plan for what we want to accomplish."* (Michael Scott, Greater Yellowstone Coalition)
- **Ensuring accountability:** Setting clear, measurable goals lays the foundation for accountability. Board, staff, and funders can all measure success. *"We have a jumping off point, something to test our progress against and recalibrate. We also maintain an objective to be opportunistic within the context of the goals. We've been willing to deviate within the context of the plan, making the choice in a conscious way, not just reacting."* (Steve D'Esposito, Earthworks)

Convinced? Read On.

Strategic Planning can be as simple or as complex as you need it to be for your organization's current situation and what it is trying to accomplish. Across these variations, we have found some common principles or ingredients for successful strategic planning:

- **Start small and keep it simple:** Design a process for doing strategic planning that fits where the organization is in its development. For example, a small, all-volunteer organization's first planning project might focus on selecting priorities just for the next year.

Once you get planning into the culture, you can make the process and the plan more robust over time.

- **Include key stakeholders:** Those who will make or break the implementation need to be involved in the planning in some way. Either board or staff can initiate the planning, take the lead, and make it happen the first time. Use a process in which a planning committee does a lot of the work and other stakeholders are brought in at appropriate times to give input and make decisions.
- **Gather data:** Learning about how the organization is perceived by those who care about or are affected by it doesn't need to take a lot of time or effort. A written member survey sent out with your newsletter or as an e-mail attachment can be a fine way to start. It's important, too, to talk with people outside the organization. Try to get impressions about the effectiveness of your work from funders, people in the community, government, media, and groups who are not yet allies.

Here's how one group made this information-gathering process fun: Kathryn Molloy, executive director of the Sierra Club of Canada, British Columbia Chapter, invited politicians, funders, colleagues, and activists to "advice parties." With a host helping with the list of invitees and providing a meal and a facilitator to guide the conversation, Kathryn was able to listen carefully, engage these stakeholders, and learn what they thought about the issues and the organization.

- **Identify key strategic issues:** The data collection process is good for teasing out key issues for the organization now and in the future. It's important to keep an eye on these key issues throughout the planning process, making sure to build in programmatic and organizational goals and strategies that address them.
- **In the planning, focus first on program:** Be specific when it comes to program goals. Then, set goals for internal organizational development such as staffing, funding, and infrastructure needed to achieve the program goals.
- **Be concrete about how you will implement and evaluate progress:** Launch implementation and build follow-up into the fabric of the organization by tying the strategic plan to annual operational planning, individual work plans, campaign planning, and communications planning.
- **Consider using an outside facilitator:** The conservation leaders we spoke with commented that an outside facilitator provides impetus and momentum for the process and can challenge the organization to think and act strategically. They emphasized that the facilitator needs to know how to design a process that fits an environmental organization specifically, and be able to serve as a resource. They added that it's crucial for a facilitator to get to know the specific organization and its culture in order to be able to challenge it throughout the process. Leaders want facilitators to know enough to contribute to identifying strategic issues and ensuring that they are addressed, without pushing their own agendas for the organization. "*There's no way we could have done it without [facilitator]. A good facilitator makes the process work.*" —John Horning, Forest Guardians. "*It's harder for an internal person to ask tough questions.*" —Michael Scott, Greater Yellowstone Coalition

- **Set a realistic timeline and use time as a driver:** It is challenging to add strategic planning into the life of an organization when people are already busy. Check the proposed strategic planning process and timeline against other important events and deadlines. Wherever possible, do double duty, including strategic planning work with other events or meetings. A strategic planning process typically takes six to nine months, but useful planning can be done in three months or be spread over a year. Once the timeline is set, use it to keep things going while being open to adjusting it as needed along the way.
- **Keep it alive:** It will be “bullshit in a binder” if it stays on the shelf.

Putting it into Practice

Putting these principles into practice will get you a process that looks something like the steps outlined below. This sequence is not meant to be used as a cookie-cutter process, but rather to give you a framework for charting and tailoring your organization’s own course.

- 1. Get ready to plan:** Typically, strategic planning is initiated by the executive director or by the board of directors. Whoever initiates it needs to first get support from other leaders then figure out who’s actually going to run the process—usually a committee of board and staff members with a facilitator. [[Click here](#) for a sample planning committee job description.] The Planning Committee’s first task is to clarify the specific purpose of the planning process and what the organization seeks to accomplish by doing it. [[Click here](#) for sample strategic planning purpose and desired outcomes.]
- 2. Design the planning process:** Based on what you’re trying to accomplish, agree on who will be involved in the process and the sequence of activities and timeline. [Click here](#) for a tool to help identify relevant stakeholders and [here](#) for a sample strategic planning process outline.
- 3. Understand the lay of the land:** Through some combination of survey, interviews, focus groups, and documented data, gather the information you need to develop your plan. Compile it and pull out the key themes or issues that you want to address in the planning.

Typical questions are:

 - What economic, social, political trends will affect our work in the coming years?
 - What challenges and needs do we need to address with our work?
 - How do our members and supporters perceive our work? What do they wish we were doing?
 - How do other people in our community who are important to our work view what we’ve done so far (such as legislators, funders, key civic movers and shakers)? What do they wish we were doing?
- 4. Plan:** Typically, planning is initiated in a one- to three-day meeting of decision makers (board and staff) held away from the office. Involving others who really care about the future of the organization, such as volunteers, members, donors, key community members and allies, brings additional strategic and creative thinking to the task.

During the planning retreat, the group absorbs the conclusions from the data gathering and addresses questions such as:

- What are the most important issues we want to address in the next three to five years?
- What do we ideally want to accomplish in regard to those issues in that time?
- What resources will be needed?

Informed by the responses to these questions, the group develops goals, objectives, activities, and a timeline for accomplishing the ideas. This work may start at the retreat and then be finished out by the Strategic Planning Committee or by subgroups identified at the retreat. This follow-up to the planning retreat typically works as an iterative process: as plans are detailed and the committee looks at resources needed and realistic budgets, the decision-making group makes strategic choices about where to focus the organization's energies. [[Click here](#) for sample planning terms and examples.]

5. Write and finalize the plan: Once there is agreement on the elements of the plan, a writer or writing team drafts the document and circulates it for review. This review process also serves as an opportunity for rechecking how realistic the plan is and finalizing the decision making with more detailed action plans. TREC recommends that the writer(s) come from the organization itself, as the document is more likely to be embraced, owned, and implemented when written internally than by a facilitator.

6. Launch and evaluate implementation: Launch the plan by using it to create annual plans for both the organization and individual staff, as well as to guide board involvement.

It's also important to incorporate into the plan an evaluation plan that shows:

- How your organization will know whether it's accomplished what it set out to do.
- How your organization will make adjustments to the plan so that its goals are accomplished.

[[Click here](#) for a sample annual planning timeline.]

Of course, each of these phases of the strategic planning process can be broken down into a series of typical steps, and TREC has devised resources for conservation groups doing this work. A closer look at these steps, along with the tools available to implement them, are in the TREC Repository of Strategic Planning Examples and Tools, available to TREC strategic planning clients.

What Your Strategic Plan Will Look Like

When you've completed the steps above, you will have a planning document to lead you through the organization's work for the next three to five years. Here is a sample Table of Contents for a basic strategic plan:

Strategic plan Table of Contents: (Basic template or public version of a more detailed plan.)

- Mission Statement.
- Vision for the organization in the far, but imaginable future (5-10, 20 years out).
- Context the organization is operating in and key strategic issues to be addressed.
- Program goals (3 – 5 years).
- Organizational goals (3 – 5 years).

Some groups like to fill out their plans even more. The Table of Contents for a more robust

strategic planning document might look like this:

Robust Table of Contents:

- Mission and values or guiding principles.
- Vision for the organization.
- Context the organization is operating in and key strategic issues to be addressed.
- Program goals and measurable outcomes (3 - 5 years).
- Organizational goals and measurable outcomes (3 years) – includes staffing, structure, budget, fundraising necessary to support program goals.
- First-year action plans (who is going to do what, by when, to achieve goals?).
- Monitoring and evaluation plan.
- Appendix:
 - Summary of assessment data.
 - Strategic planning process overview.
 - Brief organizational history and profile (some organizations put this at the beginning of the document).

Your strategic plan may be somewhere between these two examples, adding to the minimal contents whatever is right for your group from the more robust version.

Now That You've Got It, Put It to Good Use

Once you have a clear strategic plan that board and staff are in sync on, more detailed plans and actions naturally flow from there. Here are some key opportunities for putting your strategic plan to good use:

Annual planning: Each year for the duration of the strategic plan, use it to launch your annual planning. Each year's goals, actions, and budget should be linked to moving toward the goals of the strategic plan.

Staff job descriptions and work plans: First, link job descriptions to strategic plan goals, then, in the course of annual planning, develop individual staff work plans for the year. Staff members can also use the strategic plan to make decisions on a daily basis about what to focus on and what to say “no” to.

Board member activities: Board members often wonder how they can be of service to the organization beyond fulfilling their governance role. Consider taking time at a board meeting (during annual planning) for board members to review the strategic and annual plans and commit to support activities in areas that interest them or where their talents would be most helpful.

Fundraising plans: Detailed plans on fundraising strategies and who will do what to implement them are best developed as part of annual planning and in sync with a longer term strategic plan.

Campaign plans: The strategic plan should be a launching pad for developing campaign plans, and campaign plans should be developed to be in sync with the strategic and annual plans.

Communication plans: The strategic plan should be used as guidance for developing communication plans that make the organization’s strategy and actions visible to the public. Some organizations include their Communication Plan in the Strategic Plan document.

Evaluation: Periodic reviews (quarterly or semi-annually) of the progress on the strategic and annual plans by organizational leaders (board and staff) are vital for staying on track and making conscious modifications to respond to changing conditions. Using goals and measurable outcomes to determine the impact of the organization’s work as it implements the plan provides useful learning for continuous improvement.

Don’t have time, resources, or whatever for planning? Think again.

If you’re at the “yes, but” stage, read on—what you see as a barrier to getting planning done is probably included in the following chart, along with ways groups like yours have overcome it.

Barrier	How to Overcome
<p>Time:</p> <p>“How can we get enough time with the right people (board and staff) while in the midst of demanding and much-needed program work?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Design the process to involve people in a variety of ways from being a resource, giving input, to being a decision maker. Not everyone has to participate in everything.□ Be realistic in setting a timeline. Consider what else is going on. Better to do the planning over a longer period of time than feel too crunched.□ Use the Planning Committee effectively so that other peoples’ time is used effectively.□ Connect strategic planning activities with other meetings and organizational events, so it’s not an extra activity.

<p>Objection to the concept of planning: “What’s the value of strategic planning to our organization?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Educate board and staff members on the value of strategic planning and the tangible results that can be expected. (Use this overview.) □ Start with a minimal process and demonstrate positive results then expand to a more robust process. □ Invite resistant board and staff members to talk with colleagues in other organizations who have benefited from strategic planning.
<p>Fear of rigidity: “Having a plan will limit our flexibility.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Ask yourself: Is there a real concern about having the flexibility to change strategies in response to changing conditions or is it that the people in the group like the excitement of working by the seat of their pants? □ Re-frame this notion: Use the planning process and the plan as a roadmap from which to deviate—consciously— as circumstances call for change. □ Start with a plan that clarifies vision and goals, so the activity is focused. Leave the detailed action plans to be figured out in the moment.
<p>No facilitation resources: “We don’t have the money or skill.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ TREC can assist several groups each year with strategic planning. □ If you are not able to secure facilitation from TREC, look for other resources (pro bono and for fee) through local and other environmental nonprofit assistance centers or independent facilitators. □ Recruit a facilitator to serve on your board and ask them, as a new and less-biased member, to facilitate the strategic planning process.

<p>Logistical Issues.</p> <p>“Our board and staff members are not in same location and are not on the same schedule.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Design a process that includes different ways to have input, including phone and written opportunities. <input type="checkbox"/> Set a date for the planning retreat well in advance to accommodate schedules. <input type="checkbox"/> Keep things together with frequent phone check-ins. <input type="checkbox"/> Use teams that can meet easily to do sections of the work.
<p>Unexpected changes along the way:</p> <p>“Our work is unpredictable.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Good practice for dealing with rapidly changing conditions.
<p>Conflict</p> <p>“What do we do about different visions and program priorities in the organization.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use differences to tease out options and explore them fully. <input type="checkbox"/> Use facilitation to ensure all are heard and understood. <input type="checkbox"/> Build agreement, slowly if necessary.

Next Steps: Getting Started or Improving Your Plan

Getting started: If you will be embarking on a strategic planning process for the first time, getting started may be as simple as taking three steps:

1. Clarify why it would be good to do strategic planning at this point in the organization’s history, what you would like to get out of it and any limitations in terms of time and resources (money, staff time).
2. Identify a Strategic Planning Committee to lead and design the process along with the help of a facilitator.
3. Select a strategic planning facilitator to work with you to design a process that fits your organization and what it is trying to accomplish at this time.

Improving your planning: If your organization has done one or more rounds of strategic planning and you’re ready to go to the next level with your planning process or your plan, the steps to get started are still valid.

- You may also want to explore questions such as these as you design your next process:
- Has your board been fully engaged in past planning processes? What would make it appealing and possible for the board members to engage more fully this time?
 - Did your last plan have traction with staff members? What would make staff members feel the plan was more useful and that they could implement it?

- In your previous planning, to what extent did you consult external stakeholders? Allies? Potential allies? How about sectors where you don't already know their interests? What new voices would you like to hear from?
- What would it take to really challenge your thinking as an organization, to develop an even broader vision for the organization?
- How measurable are the goals you've set in the past? Can you be more specific about your desired outcomes, building benchmarks into the plan and then evaluating your impact using them?
- How satisfied are you with the strategic plan documents you've had? How accessible and compelling are they to people who were not at the planning retreat? Is it time to put out a version for a more public audience that you want to engage in the work?

How TREC can help: TREC is here to help. If your organization is a Wilburforce grantee (see www.trec.org for details), you may request TREC assistance with your strategic planning process. As one conservation leader told us, "There are a million books [on strategic planning] that we haven't read ... the real value is TREC being there with you each step of the way."

TREC may be able to provide some or all of the following types of assistance:

- A facilitator to work with you throughout the strategic planning process.
- Access to TREC's Strategic Planning repository of tools and samples for TREC clients.
- A facilitator to provide coaching to an internal strategic planning leader or facilitator, with a focus on designing the process and helping resolve difficulties along the way. (Not for groups doing first-time strategic planning.)
- Referral to other facilitators if TREC is not able to assist.
- Connection to other executive directors or board members in organizations similar to yours who have done strategic planning and are willing to talk with you about what they've learned.

Other Resources

If, in addition to TREC's guidance, you want to read further, here are a few selected books and Websites to choose from:

Books:

Allison, Michael and Kaye, Jude. *Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide and Workbook*. 2nd edition, New York: Wiley, 2005. Available from CompassPoint, www.compasspoint.org. Extensive guidebook with worksheets that are also provided on an accompanying CD-ROM.

Barry, Bryan. *Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations*. St. Paul, MN: Amherst A. Wilder Foundation, 1997. Available at www.fieldstonealliance.org. Guide for basic strategic planning process with samples and templates that can be photocopied.

Bryson, John M. *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*. 3rd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. In-depth guide with samples. Companion workbook also available.

Benchmarking Your Organization's Development. Tacoma Park, MD: Institute for Conservation Leadership, 2002. Available at www.icl.org. Workbook for developing and using benchmarks for organizational evaluation.

Web Resources:

Planning for Change, Strategic Planning and Program Planning for Nonprofit Groups. Written to accompany a workshop hosted by Community Animation Program and Community Mobilization Program in Atlantic Canada, 2000. Permission given to photocopy.

http://www.ns.ec.gc.ca/community/pdf/strategic-planning_e.pdf or

http://www.ns.ec.gc.ca/index_e.html then go to Community Programs, Resources, Strategic Planning.

Benchmarking 101 for Nonprofits – Web article and tools at

[http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/client_pages/tools_you_can_use/04-26-](http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/client_pages/tools_you_can_use/04-26-05_Benchmarking.cfm#what_is_it)

[05_Benchmarking.cfm#what_is_it](http://www.fieldstonealliance.org) or <http://www.fieldstonealliance.org>, then go to Publications, Management & Planning.

Innovative Approaches to Planning:

Looking for some new ways to involve people in the planning and move more quickly from planning to action? Here are some newer methods being used with great success in all kinds of groups and communities around the world:

Brown, Juanita, with Isaacs, David, and the World Café Community. *The World Café: Shaping Our Future Through Conversations That Matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publications, Inc., 2005.

Related Web site: www.theworldcafe.com

Holman, Peggy and Devane, Tom. *The Change Handbook: Group Methods for Shaping the Future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publications, Inc., 1999.

Ludema, James, Whitney, Diana, Mohr, Bernard, and Griffin, Thomas. *The Appreciative Inquiry Summit, A Practitioner's Guide for Leading Large Group Change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003.

Related Web Site: <http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu.aai>

Weisbord, Marvin, and Janoff, Sandra. *Future Search, An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations & Communities*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1995. Related Web site:

<http://www.futuresearch.net>

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- Rick Johnson, Executive Director, Idaho Conservation League
- Michael Scott, Executive Director, Greater Yellowstone Coalition

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Interviewer and principal author: Rae Levine, TREC Senior Associate.

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Editor: Nancy Adess

Appendix I: Strategic Planning Committee Job Description [\(Back\)](#)

Purpose of the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC):

To lead and shepherd the strategic planning process.

The role of the SPC:

- Varies by organization. In some cases, it's best for the SPC to focus on creating a process that includes board, staff, and other stakeholders. In many instances, the SPC will take the lead both on process and content. Often, the SPC is the group that does the planning, writes the plan, and gives it to others (board and staff) to review. All these variations can work fine. It's important to clarify up front the role of the SPC with regard to process and content.

Key Responsibilities of SPC for the Strategic Planning Process:

- Design the process, with help from facilitator. (Typically the committee designs and checks for agreement with the organization's full Board of Directors).
- Clarify with the Board and Executive Director what the decision-making process will be for the planning process.
- Lead the strategic planning by maintaining enthusiasm and momentum, keeping the process on track, and building agreement on direction and goals.
- Ensure that stakeholders are involved appropriately in the process, that viewpoints are heard, and that the process is well facilitated.
- Move the process forward to decisions.

Key Responsibilities of SPC for the Substance of the Strategic Plan:

- At a minimum, the SPC ensures that the process is set up in a way that provides all needed data, analysis, and planning conversations so that a useful and implementable plan emerges from the process.
- At times, the SPC will synthesize data from all sources and present conclusions to a wider group for planning.
- In some cases, the SPC holds the planning meeting, writes the plan, sends it out for review, and revises it—that is, this group assumes full responsibility for the substance of the plan.

SPC Membership:

- Typically includes some board and leadership staff members.
- Some organizations go with an all-board or a board-and-executive-director group.

Leadership of the Committee:

- The Chair of the SPC is typically a board member or the executive director.
- In either case, the executive director must ensure that she or he or another person functions as a Strategic Planning Process Coordinator (see role description below).

The role of the Strategic Planning Process Coordinator:

- Serves as point person for coordination with the whole organization and the facilitator,
- Ensures documentation and follow-through on actions,
- Keeps the board and staff informed on the process.

Appendix II: Purposes and Desired Outcomes for Strategic Planning at a Conservation Organization

[\(Back\)](#)

Purpose of the Strategic Planning Process (broad):

(A typical strategic planning process might address between one and three of these purposes.)

- Assess the organization as it is today, chart where we want it to be in 5 years, and determine how to get there.
- Agree on our direction over the next 3-5 years in the context of our current and projected challenges.
- Prepare the organization for an upcoming leadership transition.
- Agree on our direction following a recent leadership transition/merger/reduction in funding.

Key Issues to Address in this Process:

(Initial list of issues to be addressed in planning. Starting to identify them as the process is designed helps set the stage for exploration in data collection.)

- What constituencies do we want to relate to? For what purpose? How do we want to bring to/get from these relationships?
- What is our niche or special focus within the local environmental community?
- How do we want to select program/project focus?
- How can our organization be sustainable: How do we organize ourselves to work effectively and efficiently? What financial resources are needed and how will we generate them?

Desired Outcomes for this Strategic Planning Process (specific desired products):

(A typical strategic planning process might seek to accomplish several of these possible desired outcomes.)

- Shared understanding of what's been accomplished; the organization's major strengths and capabilities.
- Agreed-upon vision of the organization at its best five years from now.
- Plan for how to get there: one-year, three-year, and five-year Goals and 1st -Year Action Plan for programs, internal operations, and fundraising.
- A clear plan to ensure financial and organizational sustainability over the next 5 years.
- Job description for next Executive Director.
- Agreement on changes to infrastructure or internal functioning needed to achieve goals.
- Greater sense of cohesion and common purpose among board, staff, and volunteers.

Appendix III: Stakeholder Involvement [\(Back\)](#)

“Stakeholders” are those who have a stake in the current or future work of the organization, that is, those who will be affected by or make it possible for the organization to implement its goals. Those who will make or break the organization’s ability to achieve its mission could be considered “key stakeholders.”

Strategic Planning is an opportunity to involve stakeholders to whatever extent the organization considers appropriate. In general, people implement what they create, so the greater the involvement in the planning, the greater the likelihood of involvement in implementing the plan.

Below is a tool to use when identifying stakeholders and deciding how to involve them. The named stakeholder groups and check marks show how they could be involved.

Stakeholder Group	Decision Maker	Type of Involvement			
		Provide Input	Keep Informed	Involved in Implementation	Tap as a Resource
Strategic Planning Committee	√				
Board of Directors	√			√	
Leadership Staff	√			√	
Professional Staff		√	√	√	
Donors/Members		√	√	√	
Major Donors		√	√	√	
Funders		√	√	√	
Community Allies		√	√		
Media			√		√
Potential members/donors		√			
Potential Partners		√			
Adversaries		√			

Appendix V: Strategic Planning Terms – Definitions & Examples [\(Back\)](#)

Mission

Mission is the reason for the organization’s existence—what it’s here to do. A mission statement typically specifies the organization’s key purpose and how it accomplishes it (core business and activities), its intended audience or constituency, and its geographic focus. Examples of mission include:

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)

- CPAWS envisages a healthy ecosphere where people experience and respect natural ecosystems.

We will achieve this by:

- Protecting Canada’s wild ecosystems in parks, wilderness and similar natural areas
- Preserving the full diversity of habitats and their species
- Promoting awareness and understanding of ecological principles and the inherent values of wilderness through education, appreciation and experience
- Encouraging individual action to accomplish these goals
- Working cooperatively with government, First Nations, business, other organizations and individuals in a consensus-seeking manner, wherever possible

CPAWS believes that by ensuring the health of the parts, we ensure the health of the whole, which is our health too.

Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative

People working together to maintain and restore the unique natural heritage of the Yellowstone to Yukon region. Combining science and stewardship, we seek to ensure that the world-renowned wilderness, wildlife, native plants and natural processes of the Yellowstone to Yukon region continue to function as an interconnected web of life, capable of supporting all of its natural and human communities, for now and for future generations.

The Wilderness Society

Our Mission—Deliver to future generations an unspoiled legacy of wild places, with all the precious values they hold: biological diversity; clean air and water; towering forests, rushing rivers, and sage-sweet, silent deserts.

What We Do—We bring to bear our scientific expertise, analysis and bold advocacy at the highest levels to save, protect and restore America’s wilderness areas.

Taglines

Taglines are re short, memorable statements that capture the essence of the organization. Tagline examples are:

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society

Keeping Canada wild at heart.
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Protecting the wild places of the Klamath-Siskiyou

Vision

Vision is a view into the future you seek to create, described in the present tense, as if it were happening now. A vision statement answers the question, “If we were fulfilling our mission and living by our values to the utmost, what would we have accomplished and what would the organization look like at X point in the future?” One example of a vision is below:

Forest Guardians

Social change is a multi-generational process that, to be successful, requires a culture of activism become established to carry the struggle forward. Our vision for nearly 15 years has been to nurture this culture of activism. More than winning lawsuits, making headlines and staking out visionary proposals to protect and restore wildlands, this will be our enduring legacy.

While special interests are still entrenched in power, most Americans want to re-establish biocentric relationship with Nature. Our most fundamental task is to help articulate anew these ancient values and ensure that leaders are held accountable to what citizens everywhere desire most deeply – a future for their children and the planet.

Values and Guiding Principles

Values and guiding principles provide guidance and inspiration to the board and staff. First, values are what an organization stands for; they are touchstones conveying the underlying beliefs of the organization. An example of values is:

Nevada Wilderness Project

- Honesty, integrity, trust, and respect—we expect this from each other, and are committed to developing external relationships based on these values.
- We recognize the intrinsic value of wilderness in Nevada and everywhere.

In contrast, guiding principles are assertions of valued behavior in specified situations. For example:

Nevada Wilderness Project

- We base decisions on what is best for the land, and what makes sense on the ground.
- We are light on our feet. This enables us to respond quickly and effectively to opportunities for wilderness protection.

Goals and Objectives

Goals are outcome statements that define what an organization is trying to accomplish both programmatically and organizationally. Objectives are precise, measurable, time-phased results that support the achievement of a goal. Objectives should be SMART:

Specific— they identify what is to happen.

Measurable—they indicate a method to measure performance and set a performance standard.

Appropriate—they support the organization's mission, vision and goals.

Realistic—they fit the capabilities of the organization.

Time bound—they outline the duration or end date.

Examples of program goals and objectives follow:

Conservation Organization

Goal: To grow the local grassroots wilderness movement through active and consistent participation in events, fieldtrips and communication with policy makers.

Objectives: (partial list)

- Develop a program of wilderness events and fieldtrips to reach out to new potential grassroots advocates. Start with three events in the first year and expand each of the next three years.
- Launch a series of training events for grassroots advocates to improve their communication with policy makers.
- By 2007, build a core group of local conservation leaders and groups able to develop and implement shared advocacy strategies.

Examples of organizational goals and objectives are:

Conservation Organization

Goal: To maintain a healthy organization.

Objectives: (partial list)

- Maintain a diverse and effective board. Recruit two new members in the 2006 to insure adequate geographic representation. On an annual basis, evaluate the work of the Board, and assess and address development needs.
- Provide sufficient salary, benefits, work environment, equipment, training and personal development opportunities to engender an effective staff that has longevity with CO.
- Maintain sustainability with diverse funding sources. Increase membership and major donor programs to provide 75% of revenue by 2008.

Appendix VI: Sample Strategic Plan Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Process [\(Back\)](#)

Purpose:

- To ensure learning and continual improvement as Conservation Organization (CO) works toward its vision of success and goals.
- To facilitate annual planning of CO’s activities, including updating and adjusting the Strategic Plan.

Process:

When	Activities and Who's Responsible
Oct – Dec. 1 st year only	Orient CO board, staff, members and allies on the plan and how to participate. Fine-tune 1 st year Annual Operating Plan and Budget to be in alignment with the plan.
Jan – June	Launch implementation of Strategic Plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Staff use plan to write annual work plans. □ Determine benchmarks: how success will be assessed or measured; collect baseline information.
June	Mid-year check on plans for the year. Board and Staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Identify what’s been done, not done and why, □ Note new information about changes in external environment, □ Draw lessons and conclusions about do-ability of this year’s plan, make adjustments as needed.
September	Initiate data collection tied to goals, objectives, and benchmarks from this year’s work to use in next year’s planning.
Oct - Dec	Board and Staff reflect on current year, with input from internal and external stakeholders, and plan for next year: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ What has been accomplished or not and why? □ Where are we in relation to the goals we set out to accomplish? □ Are assumptions about the external environment still valid? □ What are the current issues facing CO? Do they indicate need for change in priorities? □ Are the goals in the Strategic Plan still right? □ Develop (using goals in the plan and modifying as needed) goals, actions, budget for 2nd year.
Repeat each year	