

# STRATEGIC PLANNING

## An Inquiry Approach

THE CEDPA TRAINING MANUAL SERIES  
VOLUME X



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Author's Note.....	ii
Overview of Strategic Planning .....	iii
<u>STEPS:</u>	
ONE: Organizing the Strategic Planning Process.....	1
TWO: Discovery—An Organizational Inquiry .....	4
THREE: Discovery—An Environment & Resource Inquiry .....	9
FOUR: Dream—Propositions for the Future.....	14
FIVE: Vision and Mission Statements .....	17
SIX: Design—The Action Plan .....	21
A Final Word .....	24
Appendices .....	25

# INTRODUCTION

***Strategic Planning: An Inquiry Approach*** is the tenth volume in the CEDPA Training Manual Series. The manual is a workbook based on CEDPA's experience in building the skills of its NGO affiliates to define their work priorities with greater clarity and purpose and to strengthen their capacity to plan for the future. It was produced by CEDPA's Capacity Building Team with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The workbook is a self-directed series of exercises which draws on Appreciative Inquiry (see Author's Note) and traditional strategic planning approaches.

## RATIONALE

Training has acquired an important role in public and private sector development organizations seeking to meet the need for effective agents of change. The participation of civil society and women's leadership in the international policy process has expanded through the United Nations conferences on population issues, social development, and women. Leaders of NGOs offer a pragmatic view of international policy and respond to the needs of individuals and families—especially women and the poor—who are frequently underrepresented in international fora.

At the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in September 1994, women's NGOs were a catalyst in creating a new consensus that women's empowerment is central to social and economic development and population stabilization. Within the following year, women advocates had again focused world attention on their priority issues at the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in Beijing.

CEDPA and its international NGO partners played an active and influential role in the planning processes of both Cairo and Beijing, helping to develop the agendas and official agreements. These events not only helped CEDPA spread its mission goals to promote women's empowerment and reproductive health and rights, the NGO participation at the conferences also benefited the global community by alerting it to the crucial importance of making women's issues and reproductive health major global priorities. CEDPA played a key role in involving grassroots women in the planning of ICPD and in the NGO Forum of the FWCW. While this trend of greater NGO participation is a boon to issues important to women-centered NGOs, it simultaneously challenges women leaders to develop sophisticated organizational planning and management skills. In greater numbers than ever before, women have joined the international arena as leaders of influential organizations that promote gender equity. This workbook intends to expand and enhance the management and planning skills of women leaders.

## AUDIENCE

In the present time of scarce resources and rapidly changing priorities in the NGO sector, strategic planning is an essential tool which enables NGOs to define and develop their organizational mission statements, identify programmatic priorities and areas of focus, make effective use of resources, maximize opportunities and minimize obstacles, and market themselves to potential funders. This workbook has been prepared for use by administrators and managers of NGOs conducting programs in developing countries. While some of the text highlights family planning/reproductive health contexts, the workbook is in fact designed for any NGO audience with an interest in strategic planning. CEDPA's experience conducting strategic planning training around the world indicates that effective strategic planning requires a balance of technical skills, a high degree of flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances, and a genuine enthusiasm for bringing out the best in people. This workbook attempts to strike this balance in a user-friendly manner. The goal of this workbook is to make strategic planning a more accessible and enjoyable undertaking for NGOs, one where the discovery of what is possible opens up new avenues for meaningful and productive work.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Several CEDPA staff members contributed to the development of this workbook. Paul Nuti authored the manual and designed and tested the sessions. Sarah Ford made invaluable contributions to the curriculum. Frances Houck and Stacey Lissit gave technical input.

Nicole Spencer edited and managed the publication of the manual with input from Sarah Ford.

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

It should be noted that this workbook draws significantly on **Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**, a methodology for organizational development and capacity building that was pioneered at Case Western University in the mid-1980s. The workbook also draws from more traditional strategic planning approaches which are more widely used in both non-profit and for-profit contexts.

In brief, Appreciative Inquiry is a qualitative approach which emphasizes discussion and participation and encourages organizations to look for what works. The essence of AI is a focus on the **best practices** of an organization, the things it does well, rather than on the things that are "problematic." By identifying and supporting the best things and doing more of what works, the organization is moved in a positive direction. AI is typically contrasted with the problem solving approach in the following way:

PROBLEM SOLVING	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
Felt need— identification of problem	Appreciating and valuing the best of what is
Analysis of causes	Envisioning what might be
Analysis of possible solutions	Dialoguing what should be
Action planning (treatment)	Innovating what will be
<b>BASIC ASSUMPTION:</b>	<b>BASIC ASSUMPTION:</b>
An organization is a problem to be solved	An organization is a mystery to be revealed

The idea of marrying aspects of both strategic planning approaches (the problem solving approach and the Appreciative Inquiry approach) emerged in conversations held with CEDPA staff members on the Capacity Building Team. It was agreed that the language employed by AI would be more suitable and meaningful for NGO audiences in developing countries, and that the emphasis on exploring the conditions and relationships necessary for people to work together in productive and energetic ways

would be appealing. Most importantly, the workbook outlines a process that is flexible and user-friendly. It is not orthodox by any means, and the focus throughout is on providing NGOs with a model "conversation" to conduct about their future.

Readers interested in learning more about Appreciative Inquiry should consult Appendix B: Resources for Strategic Planning. AI-related materials are listed in **bold**.

# OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

This workbook is a step-by-step guide to a process known as strategic planning. By following the steps in the workbook, you and your co-workers will come to **know** your organization better than you did before, **value** what your organization does successfully, and be in a better position to **plan** for what your organization imagines. The promise of this workbook is that your organization will always put its best foot forward in deciding what it wants to be and what it wishes to accomplish in the future by concentrating on the things it does well now. Strategic planning is a surprisingly simple process for the organization that clearly understands why it exists. First, let's take up a few basic questions about strategic planning.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING: WHAT IS IT?

Strategic planning is an exercise in clarifying what an organization is trying to achieve and how it proposes to achieve it. It really is not much different from the personal planning you do in your own life. All of us have some vision of what we want our lives to be, certain goals we hope to accomplish in order to make life meaningful, or even simple daily tasks which must be completed. You may see yourself, for example, pursuing a certain occupation; you may wish to learn how to play a musical instrument; or you may be responsible for organizing a family event. In each case, if you have a picture in your mind of what **success** would look like, and if you will do what it takes to succeed, you will need to figure out what steps are necessary. This is planning.

The same is true for your organization. More than likely, your organization has a vision of its **best future**, when it is successfully meeting its goals and making a difference. In order to arrive at this best future, you and your colleagues will need to draw a road map charting the best path. The road map will be the result of a strategic planning process during which insights are gained about your organization's direction and what it does well. Planning is the detail work, the thinking through of the steps your organization will take to reach its picture of success.

**REMEMBER:** *"If you don't know where you are going, that's probably where you'll end up—nowhere!!!"*

## STRATEGIC PLANNING: WHY DO WE DO IT?

There are many reasons why an organization like yours would undertake a strategic planning process. Here are four important ones:

1. **Affirm the Organization:** The simple act of bringing your colleagues together to discuss the organization's future is powerful. It allows you to share thoughts and ideas about why the organization exists and to look closely at the things it aspires to and values. The planning process can build a shared commitment to your organization and affirm why individual members choose to be a part of it.
2. **Discover the "Best Of":** Constructive planning will involve people in valuing what the organization does well and in considering when it performed at its **best**. As you and your colleagues, by sharing, discover when you experienced the organization at its most alive and effective moments, the possibilities for planning its future grow. If people in an organization **know** when they have performed successfully, they are likely to want to repeat those moments in the future because they were meaningful.
3. **Clarify Future Thinking:** It is common for organizations to become so caught up in and overwhelmed by day-to-day matters that they lose their direction. Strategic planning provides a **pause** for your organization to examine itself and determine if it is still headed toward its desired future. At the same time, strategic planning is an occasion to generate creative thinking, consider alternatives, raise new questions, and revisit your organization's vision.
4. **Transform Vision into Action:** Strategic planning is an opportunity to draw a road map for your organization, one which lays out the steps it must take to reach its vision. Putting together an action plan is the way your organization constructs its future and transforms a dream into a reality. The strategic planning process helps people **make things happen**.

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STRATEGIC PLANNING: WHAT QUESTIONS DOES IT ANSWER?

Whether you are planning for a program, a department, a clinic, a region, or an organization, the questions that you answer in the strategic planning process are the same. These questions are simple and straightforward; they ask you and your colleagues to examine your organization and discover what it is. As you progress through the steps of this workbook, you will have opportunities to check whether these questions are being answered. Let's take a first look at them:

1. **Why Does the Organization Exist?** Your response to this question will be a **mission statement** (sometimes called a statement of purpose) which describes the organization's main purpose and values. You will produce a mission statement in Step Five of this strategic planning process.
2. **What Gives Your Organization Life and Meaning?** Your response to this question will emerge as you and your colleagues discover the moments when your organization was at its best. You will identify the **energizing forces** which give it life and meaning in Step Two of this workbook.
3. **What Does Your Organization Want To Do?** Your response to this question will be a set of **propositions for the future** (sometimes called strategic goals) which describe your organization's ideal state of being. Put differently, propositions for the future express what the organization would be doing if it were performing at its best. You will produce your propositions for the future in Step Four of this strategic planning process.
4. **What Does Your Organization Do Well?** Your response to this question will emerge as you and your colleagues determine what factors made the high points (successes) possible for your organization. You will produce **best practices** lists in Steps Two and Three of this strategic planning process.
5. **Where Does Your Organization Wish To Go?** Your response to this question will be a **vision statement** which briefly describes a shared picture of your organization's best future—what it wishes to create or what it hopes to be. You will produce a vision statement in Step Five of this strategic planning process.
6. **How Will Your Organization Get There?** Your response to this question will be an **action plan** which outlines the specific actions your organization will take to make each proposition for the future happen. The action plan will also identify who is responsible for the actions, and it will include a schedule for completing them. You will produce an action plan in Step Six of this strategic planning process.

## STEP ONE: ORGANIZING THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Like anything else in life, time spent doing one thing means time not spent doing something else. Your organization is about to invest in a strategic planning process which will take up time, energy, and resources. Even though your organization will certainly benefit from this process, it is a good idea to think about why your organization is doing it and whether your organization is prepared to do it.

In this step, you are asked to figure out if circumstances in your organization will or will not permit a planning process at this time. You are also asked to determine whether the right environment will be possible, one where there is cooperation, support, respect, and a willingness to learn and to look at new possibilities. In short, it is important that you prepare and organize your planning process so that it is constructive. Take a moment to consider your objectives:

**TASK #1—State your objectives:** Think about **why** you want to do strategic planning. Answer the following questions to get you started.

1. What does strategic planning mean to you?
2. What do you hope to gain or accomplish?

After you have answered these questions, state one or two objectives for your organization's strategic planning. Be sure to share these objectives with your colleagues to see if they agree.

**TASK #2—Check your frame of mind:** Part of preparing your organization for strategic planning is getting in the proper “frame of mind” by focusing on positive and affirming thoughts about the participants in the process (your colleagues and stakeholders). Doing so will allow everyone to feel safe in expressing themselves, encourage creative thinking, and build commitment. The frame of mind you bring to strategic planning dictates how open, free, and productive it will be. Respond to the following statements (T = true; F = false):

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| I believe in my colleagues and I am honored to work with them. | T | F |
| I believe in what we are doing.                                | T | F |
| I see possibility all around us.                               | T | F |
| I am excited about this process.                               | T | F |
| There is a climate of enthusiasm toward future planning here.  | T | F |

If there is agreement that these statements are true for the people involved, move on to the next task. If some of these statements are **not** true for the people involved, you may find it difficult to take on a strategic planning process at this time and may wish to wait until everyone can support the process. If this is the case, it is a good idea to spend some time with your colleagues discussing the responses to the statements above and addressing their concerns. You may not be able to resolve all of the issues which are brought up, but opening a dialogue will reinforce the group's commitment to being in the right frame of mind when you do decide to undertake a strategic planning process.

**TASK #3—Check your readiness to learn:** It is important for the people in your organization to believe that they can learn and grow. If you are convinced that the organization has limits and cannot evolve, then the possibility of learning is closed off. But if you are open to learning, it is likely that you will see a future possibility that you did not believe existed before. Respond

to the following statements:

- There is more to learn about the people in the organization. T F
- It is possible that the organization can change. T F
- There are things I want to know more about in the organization. T F
- It is possible that people have not shared everything they know or feel about working for the organization. T F

If there is agreement that these statements are true for everyone involved, move on to the next task. If some of these statements are **not** true for the people involved, you may find it difficult to take on a strategic planning process at this time. As above, take some time to discuss the responses to the statements and to listen to the concerns of your group.

**TASK #4 — Prepare a schedule:** Preparing your organization for strategic planning requires that you **schedule time** for it. Because you are already busy with daily responsibilities which cannot be set aside, scheduled time is the only way to give planning the effort it deserves.

At the same time, be **realistic** and **practical** about the time available. You do not want to take up too much of people’s time or neglect the organization’s operations and engagements. While the length of your strategic planning process will vary depending on the size of the organization, it is generally the case that quicker is better. Experience shows that a brief, focused planning effort produces a better plan than an extended process which tends to wander. Respond to the following questions:

1. How will your organization continue to handle day-to-day responsibilities while involved in a planning exercise?

STEP IN PLANNING	PARTICIPANTS NEEDED	TIME	DATES
Organizing the process	All	2 hours	
Organizational inquiry	All	1 day	
Environment/ resource inquiry	All	1 day	
Propositions for the future	All	1/2 day	
Vision & mission statements	All	2 hours	
Producing action plan	All	1/2 day	

2. If there are any major events, activities, or crises currently taking up large amounts of staff time and energy, will it be possible to proceed with a planning exercise? How will you balance these demands?

3. Will all of the people involved in the planning process be able to set aside time for strategic planning?

4. Can a planning schedule be prepared?

When there is agreement that these questions can be answered satisfactorily, then proceed by making a planning schedule, using the example at left as a guide.



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**TASK #5—Assemble a Planning Group:** An important task in preparing for strategic planning is putting together a planning group. Since the main job of the planning group will be to gather perspectives about the organization and shape consensus on a strategic plan, it will be helpful if the planning group includes people from inside AND outside the organization. Remember that everyone connected with your organization has a different experience with it and can therefore contribute unique insights. Here are some general guidelines to help you put together a planning group:

1. The group should include individuals from ALL departments, divisions, and levels of the organization.
2. The group should include several stakeholders connected to the organization's work. Stakeholders may include: clients, beneficiaries, public officials, NGO partners, religious groups, donors, and others. These individuals' institutions should have a deep interest in your work.
3. The size of the planning group will vary depending on the size of your organization and the extent of its network of external stakeholders. It is less important to fix the number of planning group members than it is to include as many people as possible who share a commitment to the organization.
4. As noted earlier, the planning group will not be making decisions as much as it will be sharing experiences and finding consensus. The idea is to encourage open and honest conversation about the organization, and this means keeping the group informal, relaxed, and unstructured. Think of your planning group as a discussion group.
5. The planning group will require a **facilitator**. The facilitator need not be the leader or the boss of your organization, but s/he should be:
  - a good listener
  - positive—brings out the best in others
  - curious about people
  - neutral and unbiased
  - flexible

The person you choose to facilitate strategic planning will not be an **authority** as much as someone who can create an environment in which others feel comfortable and confident about sharing their views and contributing fully to the process. This will not require a high degree of structure or formality. On the contrary, it will require enthusiasm about leading an inquiry into your organization.

## STEP TWO: DISCOVERY—AN ORGANIZATIONAL INQUIRY

In this step, you and your colleagues will ask yourselves “What works in our organization?” and explore those moments when your organization was at its best. An assumption of this exercise is that in every organization **something works**. In planning for the future, it is important for decision-makers to be able to understand and explain exactly **what was happening** when things were working and the organization was performing exceptionally. When people begin to see and appreciate what they do well, they are in a better position to do more of it.

A second assumption of this exercise is that planning is not about solving problems but more about **embracing solutions**. You are not looking for what is broken or wrong with your organization. Instead, your focus will be on the things that have been successful. The result of this process will be statements—propositions for the future—that describe where the organization wants to be based on the high moments of its past. These statements will reflect real successes that people will want to repeat.

This step, like those that follow, involves your entire planning group. You and your colleagues will participate in a group inquiry, asking each other questions and generating information about your organization. Everyone will take responsibility for **discovering** what your organization is. Most importantly, you will choose what you want to learn about.

**TASK #1—First Interview:** Your first task is to set up a first round of interviews among the members of the planning group. The first interview is the beginning of a discussion about what **energizes** your organization. It calls on your planning group to identify what your organization does well, or its **best practices**. It also stimulates thinking about what topics the group will discuss during the second round of interviews. The task should proceed in the following manner:

1. **Break** your planning group into pairs so that every pair has at least one member of the organization’s staff. In other words, be sure that no pair is made up of two individuals who are external stakeholders.

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS—FIRST ROUND

- Describe a time when you felt most alive, involved, fulfilled, and excited about your work.
  - What made it an exciting experience?
  - What was your role or contribution?
  - Who else was involved and what were their roles?
  - What kind of project was it?
  - What were the qualities of your organization that made it a positive experience?
- What do you value about yourself? Your work?
- What attracted you to this organization?
- What are the energizing factors you feel give life and meaning to your organization?
- What are your organization’s best practices (the things it does well)?
- If you had three wishes to transform your organization, what would they be (in order of priority)?

2. **Instruct** the pairs to interview each other using the questions at left. As this may be the first interview certain members of the group have conducted, provide some guidance: keep to the subject, listen closely, encourage stories, look for enthusiasm and excitement, watch your time, etc. Allow about 90 minutes for the interviews.
3. **Suggest** to the interview pairs that they record what they learn from their partners using single words or short phrases that can be explained in more detail later if necessary. It is more important to be fully involved in the conversation than it is to write down everything that is said.

Before the interviews begin, remind the pairs to appreciate what they hear. Encourage them to share generously, learn from each other, and follow what they are curious about. Although this is an interview, it should also be seen as an enjoyable **conversation** about your organization, one where partners are speaking freely and imaginatively. It is not intended to be overly formal or structured. In fact, it might be more comfortable for the pair to go through the questions together. In other words, there does not necessarily have to be an “interviewer” and an “interviewee.” The first interview is a “stage-setting” part of the Organizational Inquiry. You are being asked to communicate to your colleagues what excites you about your work and what you value about where you work. The information you bring out will be the basis of what you look into next.

**TASK #2—Topic Selection and Best Practices:** When all pairs have finished their interviews, they should be instructed to return to the large group. The next task is to have people share what they learned in order to uncover themes related to what **works** in your organization and what gives it **life** and **meaning** (in other words, what makes your workplace worthwhile for you). It is likely that the interviews will produce a lot of information, some of which may seem unorganized and messy. At the end of this task, however, you will have identified a set of **five topics** representing what the group wants to learn more about. These topics (called **energizing forces**) will frame your strategic planning. A list of your **best practices** will also be produced here. The task should proceed as follows:

1. **Make available** a flipchart, chalkboard, or newsprint to record what is being shared by the group.
2. **Ask** each person to share the best story, the most powerful ideas, or the most exciting information they learned. Encourage people to express themselves using single words or short phrases that capture themes from the positive experiences they have had with the organization.
3. **List** the themes on the flipchart as they are shared.
4. **Open** a group discussion about the themes. Look for patterns. Reduce the list to **five topics** which affirm and value what gives life to your organization and which reflect what your planning group would like to see flourish. At right are examples of topics selected by other organizations.
5. **Get agreement** from the planning group on the topics they choose. These topics are the basis of the next inquiry, and they should be the things you believe are the most important to the work of your organization. In turn, they will shape your planning.
6. **List** your organization’s best practices. These should include anything you think your organization does well.

SAMPLE TOPICS		
Organization A	Organization B	Organization C
Innovation	Teamwork	Quality
Empowerment	Customer satisfaction	Freedom
Quality	Responsiveness	Impact
Diversity	Learning	Challenge
Learning	Shared vision	Solidarity
Organization D	Organization E	
Leadership	Partnership	
Communication	Determination to excel	
Learning	Consensus	
Research	Possibility/positive thinking	
Management	Diversity	

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**TASK #3—Design Questions for Second Interview:** Now that the planning group has decided what topics, or **energizing forces**, are worthy of a closer look, the next task is to design a set of interview questions on them. Presumably, something about all five of these topics is meaningful and important to the performance of the organization. By asking each other questions about them, you will discover what this is, how it happened, and that you can do more of it. Consider this:

*“What we ask determines what we find. What we find determines how we talk. How we talk determines how we imagine. How we imagine together determines what we achieve.”*

This task should proceed as follows:

1. **Break** your planning group into three small groups. Assign two topics to two of the groups and one topic to the remaining group. Alternatively, you could break the group into four small groups and assign one topic to three of the groups and two topics to the remaining group.
2. **Ask** that the small groups spend 90 minutes preparing three or four questions for each topic. This may seem difficult at first. Ask the groups to think about the **best** and most **positive** ways these topics have been expressed in the work of your organization. In brief, the questions should capture these topics when they have helped the organization be its best (see sample questions on page 7).
3. When the small groups have finished, return to the large group and begin refining the interview questions. Make sure that the questions are not repetitive. Check the wording for accuracy. Get agreement on the questions from everyone in the group.
4. **Write** up an interview guide. Hand out a copy of the guide to everyone in the group. Examples of interview guides used by other organizations are provided on page 7.

**TASK #4—Second Interview:** With the interview guide prepared, your next task is to set up the second interview. The interviews should be conducted in pairs, as before. At least two hours should be allotted for the interviews. Your planning group may choose to set aside a day for the pairs to interview each other at their convenience, or it may choose to have the entire group come together so that the pairs can conduct the interviews all at once during a two-hour time period. This task should proceed as follows:

1. **Break** your group into pairs so that every pair has at least one member of the organization. No pair should be made up of two external stakeholders.
2. **Instruct** the pairs to interview each other using the interview guide.
3. **Suggest** that the pairs write down concise notes during the interview. As the second interviews are more extensive than the first, there is a greater need to write down the responses to the questions in detail.
4. **Remind** the pairs that the purpose of these interviews is to gather information about these topics. These interviews are the core of your organizational inquiry. This task is the starting point from which you will assess what you discover and apply it toward your strategic plan.

## SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDES

### ORGANIZATION A

#### Quality

- What product/service offered by your organization best exemplifies quality? Describe.
- What does “quality” mean to you?
- Describe a project that worked well in producing a quality product/service.
- What things are needed to meet your expectations for a quality product/service?

#### Freedom

- How does freedom affect your performance? Your work environment?
- Describe a situation where freedom played an important role or made your work easier.
- Describe a situation when you were in control.

#### Impact

- Describe something you have done that has made an impact.
- How do you feel you have made an impact on yourself? Your co-workers? Your organization? Your clients/beneficiaries? The world?
- What kind of impact should your organization be having on the categories above?

#### Challenge

- Describe a challenge that you found satisfying.
- What conditions create an environment in which you can be challenged and take risks?
- How can we keep our jobs challenging?
- What challenges you in your job?

#### Solidarity

- When did you feel most like part of a team? What made this happen?
- How does solidarity improve the way we work?
- Describe a time when solidarity contributed to the quality of your work.
- How do you create solidarity?

### ORGANIZATION B

#### Communication

- What does your organization do to increase a sense of understanding and purpose in its members?
- When new members enter your organization, what does the organization do well in educating them about its values and mission?
- Does your organization provide its members with opportunities to consider how their personal values fit with the organizational values?

#### Empowerment

- When have you felt most empowered by your organization?
- What does your organization do to encourage members to take action in whatever ways they can?
- How does your organization succeed in empowering its members?
- What factors in your organization empower people outside the organization?

#### Diversity

- What does your organization do to embrace diversity among its members?
- What does your organization do to create common goals and beliefs that allow diverse people to work well together?
- What does your organization do to make diversity a positive force for the organization?

#### Learning

- What does your organization do to stay current?
- What does your organization do to help its members think about the global perspective of their work and to encourage reflection?

**TASK #5—Analysis:** The last task in this step is to share what was learned during the interviews and analyze the information. This is the point at which you begin to see why these topics (**energizing forces**) are important to your organization and how they created successful moments in your work. The ideas, stories, and insights collected here will serve as the basis for Step Four, when the plan for the organization’s best future begins to take shape. This task, for which you should allow at least two hours, should proceed as follows:

- 
1. **Make available** flipcharts, newsprint, or a chalkboard to record what is being shared by the group.
  2. **Ask** each person to share the best story, the most powerful ideas, or the most exciting information they learned. Again, it is more efficient if people use short phrases to describe the circumstances that existed when the energizing forces helped the organization (or you as a member of the organization) perform well. An example follows:

EXAMPLE: In one group, a topic was to explore Extraordinary Customer Service. The questions were:

Describe an incident when you or someone you know went the extra mile to provide the customer what they really wanted when they wanted it.

AND

What made that possible?

When the group began to share their stories and recollections, the common theme was that people in the company/organization were touched by a customer's need and took the initiative to help, enthusiastically and thoroughly. The things that made extraordinary customer service possible in each case were that the staff person:

- identified an opportunity
- took responsibility
- had the authority
- had the information available
- had the expertise
- anticipated or articulated a need
- trusted that the company/organization would support him/her

The end result every time was that extraordinary service was provided, the customer was pleasantly surprised, and the staff person felt useful and energized. In short, the group was able to discover what was happening at the time that made this possible, and could then use this knowledge to recreate this experience in the future (Hammond 1996, 37-38).

3. **List** responses as themes or circumstances under each corresponding topic on the flipchart until each member has had an opportunity to share.
4. **Open** a group discussion about what came out of the second interviews. Point out that what is up on the flipchart represents **what is** or **what has already happened**. This will trigger thoughts about what **could be** in the future based on what already was. As the stories and experiences are shared, you are likely to recall exactly what circumstances made it possible for you to accomplish what you did.
5. **Conclude** the discussion by confirming with the group that from this information a set of strategic goals, or **propositions for the future**—declarative statements which describe what an organization at its best would look like if it were happening right now—will be prepared in Step Four.

At the conclusion of this step, you will have laid the groundwork for a future of possibilities for your organization. You will know precisely what energizing forces “move” you and your colleagues to excel; you will know what it takes to recreate the circumstances that allowed these forces to appear in your workplace; and you will have a much clearer sense of what you can accomplish. Planning under these conditions is simpler and more enjoyable because the things that inspired you to work for your organization are once again available to you and your colleagues.

## STEP THREE: DISCOVERY—AN ENVIRONMENT & RESOURCE INQUIRY

In the previous steps, you identified what works in your organization and revisited what was happening when everything was working well. You inquired into what forces give your organization its energy, motivation, inspiration, and meaning, AND you determined what specific things the organization does well, or its best practices. You have taken stock of what the organization is capable of being and accomplishing by recalling and appreciating your past successes and high points.

Now it is time to survey your operating environment and resource base, to look at what is available to your organization in its quest to reach its best future. It is one thing to know what you are capable of, it is quite another to know if you have the resources, wherewithal, and assistance you will need to achieve your vision. The challenge here is to find a fit between your organization's best future and two key elements in its operating environment: its stakeholders/partners and its financial resources. The fit your organization creates will determine the kinds of opportunities that will open up for it.

In this step of the strategic planning process you will: 1) examine your organization's relationships with its key partners and external stakeholders; and 2) scrutinize your financial situation. In each segment, you will be encouraged to see **possibilities** for your organization and to think strategically about your operating environment. As in the previous step, you should focus on those moments when things were favorable, specifically the quality of your relationships with stakeholders/partners and your financial circumstances. It may be the case that your organization has not enjoyed any significant success in either of these areas. Even if this is true, it will be useful here to **imagine** what would be happening if you were achieving success in these areas. Remember that during the last step you defined what your organization is, what it excels at, and what is possible for it. This is a good place from which to imagine success in your operating environment. With this in mind, let's inquire:

### STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

Your organization does not accomplish things by itself. It operates in a complex environment in which many different forces may affect its work. Within this environment, it is your stakeholders who are your most steadfast allies and the people and institutions who can help you avoid obstacles and reach your goals. They have a

deep interest in your organization's work. It is worth considering **who** your stakeholders are and **why** they support you. Your organization's future depends, in part, on the people and institutions who are interested in its activities. Their motives can be different and they may come from many backgrounds with different interests, so it is important to consider their views when planning for your organization.

As you plan for your future, it is a good idea to "take the temperature" of your stakeholder/partner relationships from time to time. In other words, consider what your stakeholders/partners **value** about your work. Consider also what your organization gains from its stakeholder/partner relationships.

**TASK #1—List Your Stakeholders/Partners:** Your network of stakeholders and partners is an important asset and will make a difference in how your organization performs. It is a good idea to know who your stakeholders and partners are so that you are in a better position to determine the quality of your relationship with them. Make a list of your stakeholders and partners. A sample list may look something like this (see top of page 10):

**STAKEHOLDER:** An individual, group of individuals, or institution that is an important audience, client group, beneficiary, supporter, or investor in the organization.

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### SAMPLE LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS &

- Service users (clients, beneficiaries, customers)
- National and local government officials
- Organization members
- Organization staff
- Organization volunteers
- Board members
- Business community representatives
- Union officials
- Religious institutions
- Donors and funders
- International/multilateral organizations

### TASK #2—List the Ways Your

**Stakeholders/Partners Help:** Look closely at your list of stakeholders and partners. Open a brief discussion based on the following questions:

- In what ways do your stakeholders and partners demonstrate high interest and/or involvement in your organization's work?
- In what ways does a partnership exist between your organization and your stakeholders/partners? (A partnership implies a relationship of equals in which both partners contribute something to the relationship.)

Following the discussion, make a list of the specific ways your stakeholders and partners might (or already do) assist your organization. Think in terms of what your organization lacks or needs and what your stakeholders and partners have that they can share with you. A completed list might look like this:

- political support
- access to more membership and support
- technical assistance
  - information resources and research
  - consultants and specialized expertise
  - training opportunities
  - logistical/administrative assistance
- access to funding opportunities and connections
- greater visibility and public attention

The important point is that your organization does not **need** to be perfectly positioned or endowed with a wealth of resources and expertise in order to carry out its vision successfully. On the contrary, if your organization has healthy, cooperative relationships with its stakeholders and partners, it is in a good position to access the support and resources it does not currently have. Your stakeholders and partners should be regarded not only as boosters of the work you do but as providers and contributors as well. The reason they are called stakeholders is because they have a stake in seeing your organization succeed, and they will, to some extent, make their resources available to you to facilitate this. There are **opportunities** that come from maintaining good relationships with your stakeholders and partners.

The key to opening up these opportunities is the **quality** of the relationships. In the following task, your planning group will discover what it means to have constructive relationships with stakeholders and partners by inquiring into the group's collective experience. At one time or another, whether with your organization or with a different organization, everyone in your group has been part of an effective professional partnership. The discussion questions on the next page will lead you to express what those experiences were like and how they can be repeated.



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As you discuss your experiences of good stakeholder/partner relationships, keep these two larger questions in mind:

- What opportunities are out there in the world among our stakeholders and partners?
- What can we do to ensure that we take advantage of these opportunities?

**TASK #3—Group Discussion & Best Practices List II:** Using the questions below, set up a group discussion. The facilitator should pose these questions in the broadest sense, that is, in a way which invites members of the group to describe **any** stakeholder/partner relationships they have had that were especially positive and effective. Allow about two hours for the discussion.

1. **Record** on newsprint the highlights of what is being shared in single words or short phrases under each question.
2. At the conclusion of the discussion, take a few moments to **review** the material the group has generated. The facilitator should then request that the group produce a **best practices** list for relationships with stakeholders and partners. The list should summarize what your organization would be doing in a model successful relationship.
3. **Produce** the list and get agreement from the group. This document will be a part of your strategic plan and will keep your organization focused on what is to be gained through collaboration with stakeholders and partners.

#### FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Your organization's financial picture is a critical part of its best future. Reaching a point where the organization has the means to match its vision of what it wishes to accomplish is one of the most important challenges you will face as a non-profit organization. While it is difficult to determine with certainty whether you will have the necessary resources to carry out your plans, it is less difficult to begin thinking strategically about **possibilities** for a sound financial situation. This requires: 1) an inquiry into how the organization has handled its funding situation; 2) an evaluation of the fit between your future program plans and your available resources; and 3) a strategy outlining how you will secure funding.

**TASK #4—Group Discussion on Current Financial Picture:** In this task you will determine your current financial status and look at your financial history. Doing so gives you a basis from which to work and a starting point from which to begin imagining ways of enhancing your organization's financial position. The idea is to generate as much useful information as possible about what "has been" in the realm of your financial situation. To do this, open a group discussion and address the following questions (see top of page 12).

#### QUESTIONS—STAKEHOLDER INQUIRY

- Describe a time when you were involved in a good partnership. What made it a good partnership?
- What skills and values do you bring to building a good partnership?
- What does your organization do well that makes it a good partner organization (its skills, values, practices, traditions, etc.)?
- Think about a current partner relationship you have with another organization.
  - How did the relationship begin and develop?
  - Why was your organization interested in the partnership?
  - What challenges did your organization deal with in the partnership?
  - What have you learned from this partnership?
- Why is building partnerships important to your organization? What, ideally, are the benefits and outcomes of a good partnership?
- What do you look for in inviting a partnership with another group? What questions do you ask a new potential partner?
- Think ahead to the future. What does the ideal partnership look like? How does it work?
- What things do you wish your organization were doing to create good partnerships?

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**QUESTIONS—  
FINANCIAL RESOURCES INQUIRY**

- Describe a time when your organization was in a favorable financial situation.
  - What was this like?
  - What was happening?
  - What were the circumstances which enabled this to be?
  - Who was involved?
  - What were the important factors about the organization that made this a favorable experience?
- What does your organization do well in the area of financial planning/management?
- If you could transform your organization in the area of financial planning/management, how would you do so?
- What are your current sources of financial support?
- What are your current costs?
- Is there a process in your organization for seeking out new sources of support? If so, can you describe it?

**QUESTIONS—  
FINANCIAL RESOURCES INQUIRY**

- Has the organization determined what its programs and activities will be for the next 1-2 years?
- Is there a fit between what you are proposing to do and the resources you may have available? Is the fit realistic?
- Has the organization estimated the cost of these activities, including the necessary administrative and managerial costs to support them?
- Has the organization established fundraising targets for these activities?
- Can you recall an experience where there was a good fit between your programs and activities and your ability to support them financially?
  - What was happening?
  - What made it successful?
  - Who was involved and what were they doing?

The responses to these questions should provide a good picture of your organization's thinking in connection to its financial situation, as well as insight into some of the things that have worked well for the organization in this area. Here you are asked to determine the extent to which your organization can make financial resources available. The organization's history of success in being able to support its programs and activities and, ultimately, its goals, is what must be discovered in order to know what is possible. You should record these responses.

**TASK #5—Group Discussion on Current Needs:**

As the planning process continues and you begin to identify your program/action priorities for the future, you will have to make rough estimates of what they will cost. Arrange a second group discussion to gain some clarity into the fit between your program/action priorities and your funding needs. This will be your budget preparation.

The budget is the financial blueprint of your organization. It maps out everything your organization wishes to do (usually for a period of one year) and records what it will cost. The budget should be based on your strategic plan, and it should establish both your goals for generating money and your guidelines for spending money. The budgeting process is your organization's attempt to create a fit between its programs and activities and its funding requirements.

When the organization has determined in detail its plans for the next year or so (i.e., its best future and its propositions for the future), sketched out its programs and activities, taken stock of its existing resources, and begun to identify possible funding sources, it is ready to develop a budget. At left are questions which may be helpful as you and your colleagues begin considering the budget.

These questions should help you exercise some discipline in your planning for the future. Unless your organization can always secure the resources required to do everything it wishes to do, the "first draft" of a budget will probably have to be revised. Remember that budgets are

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reviewed periodically to maintain the fit between programs/activities and funding. This is particularly important for NGOs because it is difficult for them to project future revenues. Differences between actual and budgeted income and expenses may result from a number of things: seasonal and unanticipated expenses, delayed funding, insufficient fundraising, or simply an unrealistic budget. When these discrepancies emerge, the budget (or the “fit”) must be revised to reflect the current situation. In short, the budget is a “living document” and the process of maintaining it requires corrective action from time to time.

**TASK #6—Strategize to Secure Resources:**

Perhaps most important to your organization’s financial health is its strategy for securing the funds it will need to operate effectively and maintain the course toward its best future. Although many NGOs undertake fundraising activities, they are often unsuccessful. This is partly due to insufficient planning. Before your organization proceeds to look for funds, a fundraising plan should be developed. Fundraising plans will differ from organization to organization and from context to context, but the basic questions any fundraising effort will have to address are very much the same. In brief, putting a fundraising plan together is an exercise in gathering information that allows you to identify the best fundraising opportunities.

At right are several questions which may be helpful in devising your organization’s fundraising strategy. Arrange a group discussion and record the responses to these questions.

You and your colleagues can become successful fundraisers if you invest time into planning your fundraising strategy and using the skills and talents of your organization.

QUESTIONS—  
FINANCIAL RESOURCES INQUIRY

- What will be the goal of your planned fundraising strategy? Do you want to:
  - Cover the cost of a one-time event?
  - Cover the start-up costs of a program/activity?
  - Continue support for an existing program/activity?
- Do you have an idea of how much (a target amount) you would like to raise through fundraising activities (based on what you expect your expenses to be)?
- Does your organization have individuals with a history of successful fundraising or donor grant solicitation? If not, how will your organization obtain this expertise?
- Does your organization have materials describing its objectives, activities, and financial performance that it can provide to potential contributors?
- Has your organization’s program of work been clearly defined and does it respond to a clear need in your community? Does it duplicate services offered elsewhere?
- Has the credibility of your organization been established (or do you have a reputation for quality work and a record of successful programs)?
- Are there any local, traditional, or organizational policies which may affect how you raise funds or whom you approach? If so, describe what they are and how you will deal with them.
- Does your organization have experience reporting back to contributors on how their funds were used?

## STEP FOUR: DREAM—PROPOSITIONS FOR THE FUTURE

You have now arrived at the point in the strategic planning process where you can answer the question “What does your organization want to do?” It is time to dream about what the future can be based on what has been. You and your colleagues remembered what it was like to be at your best and identified the energizing forces that made these high points possible. Now, with the information fresh in your mind, you have an opportunity to capture these positive images and use them as the basis of an action plan.

Developing **propositions for the future** is basically the same as setting strategic goals. The one difference, however, is that propositions for the future are grounded in realities from the past and are stated in the present tense as if they are already true. The beauty of propositions for the future is that they have meaning beyond their words: they remind us of what is best about the organization and how everyone can participate in creating more of what is best. They come from stories about the past. From the perspective of planning, a proposition for the future is powerful since it can give people the knowledge that they can impact the direction of their organization.

Your propositions for the future will be statements of what your organization’s future will look like after its issues/concerns have been successfully addressed. As noted above, propositions are stated in the present tense as if they are already true. Desired changes are expressed in a positive way rather than as shortcomings or problems. For example, a critical issue such as “Organization X needs to improve internal communication” could be restated as a proposition for the future to read “Organization X has effective systems for internal communication that include weekly staff meetings, a reading file that is circulated daily, and written monthly status reports from the director.” In order to produce your propositions for the future, you must begin to think about **solutions** to your concerns which draw on your vision of what the situation would look like once the ideal state of affairs has been reached.

Propositions for the future are your **destination** during the strategic planning process. They build on the discoveries about yourself, your work, your organization, and your desired (best) future that you made during the interviews and discussions held earlier in this process. Armed with this wealth of insight, you and your colleagues can develop propositions for the future which will open up new **possibilities**. Propositions for the future are exciting because they capture the enthusiasm, confidence, direction, and vision of the people in your organization. They are equally inspiring because they are based on things you have achieved before in your collective experience.

**TASK #1—Draft Propositions for the Future:** The task of preparing propositions for the future will require you to work with the information you produced during the interviews in Steps Two and Three. You are asked here to write statements for each of the topics (energizing forces) which describe what your organization would be doing if it were performing well. To begin, it may be helpful to provide some basic instructions as well as examples of propositions for the future drawn from other organizations. Two different sets of instructions for this exercise are included below along with criteria for good propositions for the future and examples of propositions from other organizations.

### ***Instructions for Preparing Propositions for the Future (Version 1):***

- Find examples or stories of the **best** of each energizing force.
- Figure out what circumstances made the **best** possible.
- Envision what **might be**. Write a statement, in the present tense, that describes the ideal future as if it were already happening.

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- To stimulate your thinking, try starting each possibility proposition with the words “what if,” and then remove them when you finish each one. EXAMPLE: “*What if we keep our family planning clinic open during the hours most convenient to our clients.*”

### **Instructions for Preparing Propositions for the Future (Version II):**

Imagine that it is the year 2001 (or any year in the future) and you have been given a special assignment in your organization. The assignment is to do an assessment of the organization’s performance, operations, morale, management, etc. You are putting together a “snapshot” of what you learned in interviews with colleagues. You know that the organization has five energizing forces, and you will write your report in these terms. Sum up what you have found about each energizing force in one, two, or three sentences. What do you expect reality will look like for your organization in 2001? Write this in the present tense as if it is already happening (Hammond and Royal 1998, 197).

CRITERIA FOR GOOD PROPOSITIONS FOR THE FUTURE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is it provocative? Does it stretch your usual routine or challenge your usual assumptions?</li><li>• Is it based in reality? Are there examples which illustrate that it is a real possibility?</li><li>• Is it desired? Do you want it as part of your desired future?</li><li>• Is it stated positively and in the present tense?</li><li>• Does it involve people to a high degree?</li></ul>



The task of preparing your propositions for the future should proceed as follows:

1. **Break** the large group into five small groups, one for each energizing force. Alternatively, you may allow people to decide which energizing force they wish to work on and form groups this way. If this is what you decide to do, be sure that all five of the groups have at least three members.
2. **Instruct** the groups to prepare 1-2 propositions for the future on the energizing force they have selected or been assigned. Remind the groups to use the notes and detailed information that were produced during the second interviews. Again, look for common circumstances that created a sense of pride or led to an excellent performance. Allow 90 minutes for this task.

Note that these are not statements that describe an **existing** situation, but rather statements about the organization’s vision of a desired future. You may recall earlier in the process when it was suggested that the **language** we use **creates** our reality. In the case of propositions for the future, we know that to state the vision as if it already exists will move the organization in that direction.

**TASK #2—Presentation and Endorsement of Propositions for the Future:** The second and final task of this step is to have the groups present the propositions for the future they have prepared. This is your chance to see whether the propositions describe where the organization wants to go and whether they are based on the high points of where it has already been. The main question everyone in the group should be asking themselves is: “Do these propositions **remind** me of the energized moments I discovered?” This task should proceed as follows:

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## EXAMPLES OF PROPOSITIONS FOR THE FUTURE

### Leadership/Management

- Our management style is participatory, open-ended, and results-oriented.
- There is a climate of innovation, flexibility, individual growth, and respect.

### Communication

- We foster a culture of open communication, mutual trust, respect for difference, inclusiveness, and personal empowerment through the use of a variety of appropriate and timely communication strategies.
- We value each other's opinions, even when we disagree.

### Quality

- We, as well as our clients, have an explicit understanding of what quality means and we are defeating the many enemies of quality.
- We have a list of enemies of quality.

### Teamwork

- We fulfill our commitments to the team.
- We take the time to get to know each other.

### Impact

- We follow up with our beneficiaries by asking them how our service was used, whether it was effective, and if they would have done anything differently.
- Our work reflects our awareness of our clients and the feedback we receive from them.

### Sustainability

- We have a diversified funding base for the implementation of our activities. We are committed to sustainability. Structures are in place to prevent the termination of any of our activities if individual funding sources withdraw.

1. In the large group, **ask** each small group to present its propositions for the future. A flipchart or newsprint is ideal for this.
2. **Refine** the propositions if necessary. Check them against the criteria listed on page 15 for good propositions. Get final agreement on each of the propositions. These propositions will serve as the foundation for the action plans you will develop in Step Six of this strategic planning process.

A final thought on propositions for the future. The set of propositions you prepare will be a "living document" which will change as new ideas and circumstances occur. Your propositions need not be fixed forever. During the life of these propositions, the organization will know what to do and how to grow toward its vision. When it is time to revisit the propositions for the future, the organization can begin another process of interviewing to discover if it needs to change and in what ways.

## STEP FIVE: VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

Chances are that your organization has a vision statement and a mission statement. If it does, then this step will give your planning group an opportunity to examine them and see if they need to be revised. If it does not, then this step will give you the opportunity to develop vision and mission statements.

Throughout this strategic planning process you have identified moments when your organization has performed at its best, and you have imagined an ideal future when it would be performing this way all the time. You have created propositions for the future which describe what your organization would look like if it were working well. In general, you have been getting to **know** your organization better than you did before, and you have been appreciating what it is.

Now that you have learned so much about your organization and have a fresher view of it, it is a good idea to revisit your vision and mission statements. All of the insights you have gained through sharing ideas and information with your colleagues may have given you a different understanding of your organization, its vision, and its mission. You might find, for example, that the possibility propositions you have committed to are not relevant to or consistent with the current vision and mission statements. You may think that what the organization is should be expressed in another way. Before examining your statements, let's review their role in strategic planning.

### THE VISION STATEMENT

Strategic planning typically involves crafting a vision statement. A vision statement is a concise expression of your organization's best future, of what it wishes to be. Your vision is the "beating heart" of your organization's work and its image of success. People want to work for your organization because they believe in its **vision**.

The main function of a vision statement, then, is to convey what the people within your organization imagine is possible for it. This is what you have been discovering during the last few steps in this planning process.

Most important of all, the vision for your organization must be shared by all who have an interest in what the organization does. The vision should never be something that is imposed on people. Rather, it should be generated, shared, understood, accepted, and lived by everyone in the organization responsible for making it a reality.

There are two key distinctions between a vision statement and propositions for the future which should be noted. **First**, the vision statement is a broader, more general description of what the organization aspires to be, whereas propositions for the future outline specific circumstances the organization intends to create. **Second**, the vision statement is commonly used in the public presentation of your organization and for other external relations purposes as a way of communicating its existence. Propositions for the future, in contrast, are elements of the strategic planning process and are developed for internal use only. They are not intended to be used for external relations purposes.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF A VISION STATEMENT

An effective and useful vision statement typically possesses the following characteristics:

- It looks into the medium- to long-term future (usually 2-5 years);
- It is very short (usually a brief sentence, or two at most);
- It describes a fixed stage;
- It can be understood by anyone.

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**TASK #1—Draft Your Vision Statement:** Your task here is to work as a group to draft a vision statement or revise your current vision statement, if necessary. You may decide to do this as a large group or choose to break into smaller groups for discussion and then report back. Plan to spend about 90 minutes producing your organization’s vision statement.

1. **Ask** the group to imagine five years into the future. In order to stimulate thinking, consider the following questions:
  - What kind of organization do you want to become?
  - What will your organization look like in five years?
  - What have you learned about your organization during the interviews that you think should be reflected in the vision statement?

Keep in mind that this visioning process is based on the idea that people create what they imagine, and that when given the opportunity to imagine positively, they are able to tap the deepest sources of their passion and energy. In short, the responses to the questions above should challenge, excite, and inspire the group.

2. **Open** a discussion about the vision using what emerged in response to the above questions. You may wish to keep track of themes which come up in the discussion on a flipchart or newsprint. Note that although the words each person uses may differ, the ideas they express may be very similar. Identify areas of agreement which capture **everyone’s** view of the kind of organization they truly want AND conform to the characteristics of an effective vision statement.
3. **Write** down your proposed vision statement on the flipchart and check with the group to see if all are willing to stand behind it. If so, adopt your organizational vision statement!

#### EXAMPLES OF VISION STATEMENTS

“The Arts Center will become the city residents’ first place of choice for studying, experiencing, and supporting the humanities.”

“We envision an ever increasing global movement to restore and revitalize the quality of life in local communities. The Support Centers of America will be a recognized contributor and leader in that movement.”

“We seek to create an environmentally sustainable world through the participation of women and their communities in environmental protection and in shaping local, regional, and national development priorities.”



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## THE MISSION STATEMENT

While the vision statement sets out a broad picture of what your organization will be in the future, the mission statement is a more practical and precise description of your organization's purpose or reason for existence. Many people refer to an organization's mission statement as its **calling card**, or important part of its identity. It is typical for people researching an organization to ask first to see its mission statement because it conveys so much useful information.

Your organization's mission statement is a concise introduction to its work. It describes an organization in terms of its:

- Purpose: what the organization seeks to accomplish (WHY DO WE EXIST?)
- Target Audience: the target group or beneficiaries of the organization's work (WHO DO WE SERVE?)
- Business: the main method or activity through which the organization tries to fulfill this purpose (WHAT SERVICES DO WE PROVIDE and HOW DO WE GO ABOUT PROVIDING THEM?)

The most important characteristic of a mission statement is clarity. Your organization's ability to state its mission clearly indicates how well it knows where it is going. The task of producing a mission statement is an exercise in finding this clarity. Addressing the fundamental questions above will help you keep your mission statement clear and straightforward.

As with the vision statement, it is necessary that your mission statement be supported by all who have an interest in your organization's work. Consider the possibility that every single member of your organization can generate interest in its activities by speaking comfortably and confidently about its mission. Think of the positive impression you and your colleagues will make on others when you know exactly what to say when people ask, "what is your organization's mission?" Involving your planning group in the task of producing a mission statement will increase the chances that they believe in it. Additionally, research and anecdotal evidence indicate that the more people who know and understand the mission, the more likely it is to be achieved.

**TASK #2—Draft Your Mission Statement:** Your task here is to work as a group to draft a mission statement or revise your current mission statement. You may decide to do this as a large group or break into smaller groups for discussion and then report back. Plan to spend about 90 minutes producing your organization's mission statement.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A MISSION

An effective mission statement typically possesses the following characteristics:

- It gives direction;
- It is concise and compelling;
- It is easily understood and can be communicated by all members of the organization;
- It provides motivation and rallies people to a common purpose;
- It identifies the organization's central purpose;
- It expresses the organization's values;

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1. **Review** the sample mission statements below. Note whether they respond to the four basic questions listed on page 19 (1. Why do we exist? 2. Who do we serve? 3. What services do we provide? 4. How do we go about providing them?). Note the extent to which they serve some/all of these functions. Note also what characteristics you like about each of the mission statements. Discuss your observations with your colleagues.

#### SAMPLE MISSION STATEMENTS

SAMPLE A: Amasachina Self-Help Association, founded in 1967, is an indigenous broad-based NGO dedicated to the improvement of the lives of the rural poor in Ghana through the promotion of the concept of self-help.

SAMPLE B: Family Planning Organization X seeks to increase the availability and use of high-quality, voluntary reproductive health and family planning services in the capital city and surrounding neighborhoods.

SAMPLE C: The Family Planning Division of the Ministry of Health is committed to training health professionals and community workers throughout the country to provide basic and high-quality maternal and child health and family planning services.

SAMPLE D: The Young Women's Christian Association seeks to enhance the roles and socioeconomic status of women and girls and provide opportunities for spiritual development. We accomplish this by focusing our activities on leadership training, skill training, small-scale entrepreneurial development, adolescent health counseling, child survival and development, and promotion of human rights issues.

SAMPLE E: The Women's Needs Center provides free health care and support services to women who have difficulty accessing services elsewhere. The Center's extensive outreach program is designed to serve women most in need, including those who are living in poverty and/or recovering from addiction, sexual assault and violence.

SAMPLE F: The Women's Community Mobilization Association is a non-profit, non-governmental organization whose main purpose is to meet the needs of low-income women in order to promote their full participation in the social and economic development of their communities.

2. **Write** down your current organizational mission statement or, if none exists, describe what you understand your organization's mission to be. Consider whether it answers the four basic questions. Note where your current statement does or does not answer these questions clearly, and note any other questions or concerns you have about the statement.
3. **Ask** what the group has learned about your organization during the interviews that should be reflected in the mission statement. Open a discussion about the mission and try to reach consensus on the points which best capture the purpose, target audience, and business of your organization. On a flipchart or newsprint record these points as possible changes to the current mission statement or as elements of a new one.
4. **Revise** your existing organizational mission statement (or, if none exists, draft a new one) using the points agreed to in number 3 (above). Remember to consider whether your mission statement is consistent with the organization's vision statement. Write down your proposed mission statement and check with participants to see if all are willing to stand behind it. Later, circulate the proposed mission statement informally to other stakeholders and partners outside the organization and check to see if they understand it. If so, adopt your organizational mission statement!

## STEP SIX: DESIGN—THE ACTION PLAN

By this time in the strategic planning process, you and your co-workers have most likely created some enthusiasm, momentum, and agreement about your organization: what it is, what it does well, and what it wants to do in the future. You have come to **know** your organization better and to **value** the things that energize your work. You have also **produced** a set of propositions which chart the path to your vision, or your best future. You may have the feeling that “making it happen” is now possible and that the potential for innovation and action are high. You have arrived at the point where you will transform your propositions into **ACTION**. It is time to draft an action plan, the final piece of your strategic plan.

In this step, your planning group will answer the last of the six basic strategic planning questions (from the Overview): “How will our organization get there?” What you come up with here will be the final “detail work” of your strategic plan. Because everything you have discovered about your organization is grounded in realities from the past, your group can now see more possibilities for action.

In brief, you will now outline the specific actions—practical and achievable—your organization will take in order to make each proposition for the future a reality. In its final form, your action plan for each proposition will be written in a format which lists the activities to be undertaken, the schedule for completing them, the person(s) responsible for them, and the technical assistance required for each action. The challenge here is to choose actions which clearly support each proposition for the future.

**TASK #1—Review Your Building Blocks:** Throughout this strategic planning process, you have produced a series of building blocks, pieces of information and insight drawn from your collective experience, which can now be assembled into an action plan. The first task in this step is to review these building blocks and begin to see **how** they can inform your action plan. Everything you have produced has been the result of an inquiry into your organization. You are now much more familiar with your organization’s possibilities, and therefore better equipped to figure out what actions are most suitable. This step will help you do this by tying together the building blocks below. Let’s review:

In the **Organizational Inquiry (Step Two)**, you generated:

- Your **energizing forces**—the things that inspire, energize, and motivate you and your organization;
- Your **best practices**—the things your organization does well;
- Your **high points** and **best moments**—what was happening when your organization was performing well.

In the **Environment & Resource Inquiry (Step Three)**, you produced:

- A **list of stakeholders and partners**—the people and institutions invested in your organization’s success;
- An **inventory** of how stakeholders and partners can help;
- A **best practices** list for managing relationships with stakeholders and partners—the things you do well in these relationships.

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In the **Dream Phase (Step Four)**, you developed:

- Your **propositions for the future**—the strategic goals of your organization’s desired future.

In **Vision & Mission Statements (Step Five)**, you produced:

- Your **vision statement**;
- Your **mission statement**.

With your colleagues, go over each of these building blocks carefully. As you are doing so, ask yourselves these questions:

- What actions might follow logically from the following questions:
  - what energizes our organization?
  - what do we do well?
  - how have we succeeded in the past?
  - what do we gain by collaborating with stakeholders and partners?
- What actions would enable us to realize our propositions for the future AND support the five things that give our organization life and meaning?
- Given all we now know about our organization and where we want it to go, what can we do to get there?

In short, immerse yourselves for about one hour in what you have learned, affirmed, and appreciated about your organization. This will inspire action.

#### EXAMPLES

If the proposition for the future is: “We plan strategically for delivery of new family planning/ reproductive health services,” then the actions you could undertake in support of this might include:

- Conducting a needs assessment to determine a) services for which there is a demand; and b) prices consumers would pay for them.
- Developing a projection of the volume of services to be delivered each year over the next three years.

If the proposition for the future is: “We have a collaborative relationship with organizations with similar objectives in order to minimize duplication and encourage efficient use of resources,” then the actions you could undertake in support of this might include:

- Planning and organizing a workshop on NGO collaboration.
- Touring communities to meet with potential NGO partners.

**TASK #2—Brainstorm Actions:** After you have reviewed the building blocks, move right into a brainstorming session to generate lists of specific actions. This is perhaps the most exciting part of the whole process since you will now be able to see direct results—specific actions—which will begin to move you toward your desired future. During this task, you are inventing your future based on what you know is possible. Refer back to your propositions for the future, as they are the foundation of the action plan. This task should proceed as follows:

1. **Break** the large group into five small groups, one for each set of propositions for the future. Again, you may allow people to decide which group they would like to work with as long as each group has at least 3 people.

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2. **Instruct** the groups to draft a list of specific actions they feel would best realize the propositions they are working with. Note that the actions need not be complicated; they should simply make the propositions come alive in some way, or mark a step toward this.
  3. Review the lists and consider **when** the actions should be undertaken, **who** will be responsible for them, and **what** forms of technical assistance (funding, partnerships, trainers/consultants, transportation, resources, etc.) will be required.

TASK #3—**Presentation and Endorsement of Action Plans:** The third and final task of this step is to have the groups present their action plans. This is your planning group's opportunity to see whether the action plans answer the question "How are we going to get there?" The action plans should be practical and achievable and should reflect the best path to the organization's best future. This task should proceed as follows:

1. In the large group, **ask** each small group to present its action plan. A flipchart or newsprint will work well for this.
2. **Refine** the action plans as necessary. Get clarity and final agreement on all of the action plans, specifically on when the actions will be undertaken, who will be responsible, and what resources will be required.
3. **Endorse** the action plans and adopt them. Complete the Action Plan form in Appendix C for each proposition for the future.

## A FINAL WORD

Congratulations, you have completed your strategic plan!! You have successfully answered the six basic questions that must be addressed in the strategic planning process.

- You have prepared a **mission statement** in response to the question, “**Why does your organization exist?**”
- You have identified your **energizing forces** in response to the question, “**What gives your organization life and meaning?**”
- You have developed a set of **propositions for the future** in response to the question, “**What does your organization want to do?**”
- You have produced two **best practices lists** in response to the question, “**What does your organization do well?**”
- You have established a **vision statement** in response to the question, “**Where does your organization wish to go?**”
- You have prepared an **action plan** in response to the question, “**How will your organization get there?**”

With its strategic plan in hand, your organization is in a good position to move forward in pursuit of its best future. In addition to providing you with a charted path to the future, the strategic plan enables you to know your organization better, diagnose its strengths, and value the collective skills of its staff. The strategic planning process you just concluded helped you to clarify what you want to accomplish and to solidify your expectations for the future.

There is, however, one last reminder. It is common for organizations to either not implement their new strategic plan consistently or to file it away in a cabinet and not implement it at all. It is critical that you and your colleagues take responsibility for the plan you have just produced. Remember that carrying out the plan, monitoring its progress, and adjusting it to your organization’s changing reality are also part of the strategic planning process. You should check your progress periodically (every 1-2 months) in order to see where you are. For example, ask yourselves:

- Are we following through on our propositions for the future?
- Is our vision statement still appropriate?
- Are we doing what we do best?
- Is our action plan being implemented on schedule?
- Is there a fit between our programs/activities and our funding?

If adjustments are necessary, make them. The ability to be flexible and to gauge when new developments or issues require you to change your action plan are skills you should cultivate among your staff.

You should also remember that planning is continuous. It is an ongoing cycle of analyzing, communicating, planning, monitoring, and then analyzing again. After about one year of operating under a strategic plan, get together with your colleagues to appraise what did and did not work. Were the propositions for the future too unrealistic? Did you achieve what you wanted? If no, why not? Should any changes be made to the planning process? Should you involve other people? In short, strategic planning is a flexible process that you can adapt to suit your organization’s context and specific needs.

In the end, the most significant benefit of the strategic planning process is that it puts you and your colleagues in touch with what you want your organization to be and with the people who make your organization what it is.

## APPENDIX A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Appreciative Inquiry:** A philosophy for change and organizational analysis in which people in an organization ask questions aimed at discovering what is valuable, meaningful, and successful in the organization in order to expand the realm of what is possible.

**Best Practices:** “Model” procedures, methods, policies, structures, and actions of an organization which work effectively and produce desired results. The things that an organization does well.

**Energizing Forces:** The factors which give an organization energy, motivation, inspiration, and life and which create moments of excellent performance.

**Mission:** An organization’s purpose and reason for being. A mission statement explains what functions the organization performs, how it performs these functions, and whom the organization serves.

**NGO:** Non-governmental organization.

**Operating Environment:** The range of elements and forces outside of an organization that affect and are affected by the organization. The operating environment may include government, businesses, donors, cultural and technological innovation, and religious, social, and educational institutions.

**Propositions for the Future:** Statements which describe the ideal circumstances that will support the possibility of doing more of what works. Statements which capture what things will look like when an organization has achieved its best future.

**Stakeholder:** An individual, group of individuals, or institution that is an important audience, client, group, supporter, or investor in the organization.

**Strategic Planning:** A process by which an organization identifies and discusses key organizational issues, analyzes its environment, determines its priorities, and maps out a medium-term future (usually 2-5 years).

**Vision:** An organizational vision describes the future of an organization and the impact that organization will have on the communities of its beneficiaries.

## APPENDIX B RESOURCES FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Amherst Wilder Foundation. 1986. *Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations*. St. Paul, MN: Amherst Wilder Foundation.
- Bobrow, Edwin E. 1998. *Ten Minute Guide to Planning*. New York: Macmillan Spectrum/Alpha Books.
- The Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA). 1996. *NGO Workshop on Planning Strategic Reproductive Health Programmes*. Washington, DC: CEDPA.
- Hammond, Sue Annis and C. Royal. 1998. *Lessons From the Field: Applying Appreciative Inquiry*. Plano, TX: Practical Press.**
- Hammond, Sue Annis. 1996. *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Plano, TX: Kodiak Consulting.**
- Hummel, Joan M. 1998. *Starting and Running a Nonprofit Organization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Management Sciences for Health. 1991. *The Family Planning Manager's Handbook*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.
- Support Center of San Francisco. 1994. "What Are the Steps of a Strategic Planning Process?" San Francisco: Support Center of San Francisco.
- Torok, Marianna. 1997. *Strategic Planning*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies.



# APPENDIX C ACTION PLAN

ACTIVITIES	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Person Respons.	TA Needs
1.														
2.														
3.														
4.														
5.														
6.														
7.														