
III. Deciding to do Long-Range Strategic Planning

Strategic Planning is a disciplined, ongoing effort that helps an organization:

1. critically assess where it is now;
2. determine or clarify where it wants to go, what it wants to look like, or what it wants to do in the future; and
3. lay out a roadmap for moving in a strategic direction.

Specifically, strategic planning is a process that helps courts or other organizations:

- ✓ clarify their purpose – or mission – and define their preferred future – or vision;
- ✓ assess the impact of external forces such as trends;
- ✓ examine their internal capacity to fulfill their mission and work toward their vision in light of the external forces likely to impact them in the future;
- ✓ identify critical and usually encompassing issues or key performance/result areas to address in the future; and
- ✓ define comprehensive strategies – or means – for accomplishing long-range goals and moving toward a better future.

Imbedded in our approach to strategic planning are the following assumptions:

1. The strategic plan should be future focused. At a minimum, it should look ahead three to five years.
2. The planning process should be inclusive and open. The strategic planning committee should include a wide range of people within the court (e.g., judges, managers, and possibly line staff) and/or throughout the community (e.g., law enforcement, prosecutors, public defenders, victims, social service providers, business leaders, community leaders). In addition, at key points in the process, committee members should elicit information from and disseminate information to court users, stakeholders, judges, and court staff. In short, the committee should not be a “secret club” that plans in a vacuum but rather a broad-based group of individuals with the ability to think systemically, strategically, critically, and creatively.
3. The planning process and the plan itself should be court user and/or stakeholder driven. That is, courts must know and better understand the needs and reasonable expectations of court users and stakeholders and develop strategic plans that are more responsive and accountable to them.
4. The plans that are developed through a strategic planning process should be dynamic. While good strategic plans provide a comprehensive and stable foundation for moving forward during calm as well as turbulent times – they should endure over time – the plans should be modified and updated as conditions warrant. Political and individual whims are *not* good reasons for

modifying a court's strategic plan whereas a significant funding crisis or an opportunity to undertake a project that will increase access to a court or provide improved services to court users might be.

5. A strategic planning process and the resulting strategic plan affords courts an opportunity to open dialogue with external leaders, educate others about the courts, and forge new partnerships with other organizational leaders and members of the community.
6. A strategic plan should be outcome oriented and progress should be measurable. It should include the results – accomplishments/ outcomes – to be achieved, not just a series of activities. And, progress on the strategic plan and successes should be measurable.

Strategic planning is a resource intensive process that if done for the right reasons and under the right conditions can yield significant benefits and results to courts and other organizations. Consequently, the decision to do long-range strategic planning should be a deliberate and conscious one made by informed organizational leaders.

A set of questions that court leaders should consider when deciding to engage in and/or embark on a strategic planning process concludes this section. Derived from our experiences in facilitating strategic planning processes in over 50 diverse jurisdictions, the questions are intended to help court leaders assess their organization's "readiness" for doing strategic planning as described in these *Mentoring Guidelines*. In essence, they are indicators of

success. Affirmative responses to the questions indicate a “higher degree of readiness” for doing long-range strategic planning. That is, affirmative responses indicate that conditions are right and authentic reasons for doing strategic planning are present.

Negative responses, on the other hand, to one or more of the following questions should cause organizational leaders to pause before embarking on a strategic planning process. Negative responses should cause organizational leaders to critically assess whether: (1) a strategic planning process can be successful in the presence or absence of certain conditions or authentic reasons; and (2) having and implementing a strategic plan will indeed benefit the court or organization.

Finally, awareness of some of these factors prior to launching strategic planning processes has enabled court leaders and facilitators of strategic planning processes to build in safeguards and ultimately overcome or minimize their adverse affects. In sum, careful consideration should be given in all organizations before launching a strategic planning process and developing a long-range strategic plan.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS: ARE CONDITIONS RIGHT FOR DOING STRATEGIC PLANNING?

Prepared by: Brenda J. Wagenknecht-Ivey, Ph.D.
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| 1. People have time to participate in developing <i>and</i> following through on the strategic plan. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Everyone is too busy with other, more pressing matters. |
| 2. There is an urgent and compelling need – or pressing reason or opportunity – to do strategic planning. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | An urgent, pressing, or compelling need, reason, or opportunity is absent. |
| 3. There are several champions or sponsors for the strategic planning process and the completed strategic plan. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | There are no leaders within the organization willing to lead the effort, build support for, or implement the plan. |
| 4. Organizational leaders (judges, administrators, and managers) are genuinely interested in and willing to critically assess the court's performance. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Leaders are uninterested in a critical analysis and unwilling to hear or listen to things that should be improved; they think what the organization is doing and how it is performing are just fine. |
| 5. Leaders and managers are willing to change the priorities of the organization and do business/work differently in the future. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Change is unlikely; the organization will not likely re-think and/or shift its priorities or change and improve how cases are processed and managed or what and how programs and services are delivered. |

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6. There is stability in the organization's leadership.	6	5	4	3	2	1	There is a volatile, political internal or external climate where the organization's leadership is likely to change and consequently, the organization's direction and priorities are likely to change.
7. Based on the strategic plan, the organization is willing and likely to shift how its resources are distributed and utilized.	6	5	4	3	2	1	It is likely that the organization's strategic plan will not shape or affect the budgeting process and how resources are deployed.
8. Organizational leaders will collectively work together to follow through on the strategic plan.	6	5	4	3	2	1	It is likely that judges, court managers, and court staff will continue to do what they have always done and the responsibility for implementing the strategic plan will fall to a select few.
9. The organizational culture supports an open and inclusive planning process that will determine the organization's long term direction and priorities.	6	5	4	3	2	1	The existing leadership wants primary control over this.
10. The outcomes to be achieved and the benefits to be gained by developing and following through on a strategic plan are clear.	6	5	4	3	2	1	The desired outcomes and benefits to be gained are unclear; judges and staff are wondering why the court is doing strategic planning.

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(continued)

Instructions:

1. Add up the numbers and place the total on the line below.
2. See the attached table for interpreting your score.
3. Compare and contrast how you rated your organization's readiness to do strategic planning with how other members of the planning committee rated the organization's readiness. Discuss the differences.
4. Determine what steps you/others need to take to increase the likelihood of having a successful strategic planning effort.

Total Score: _____

INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS

Total Score:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 50 – 60 | GREEN LIGHT Proceed with your planning effort. |
| 30 – 49 | CAUTION Identify the areas that need attention; take the necessary steps and time to improve in those areas and then proceed deliberately and carefully. |
| < 30 | STOP Do not proceed with your planning effort at this time; take the necessary steps and time to build support for the planning effort before proceeding; only proceed once you have successfully addressed the areas that need attention. |

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1. The court genuinely desires to assess and improve its performance – the adjudication of cases and legal matters and the delivery of court services – and be more responsive and accountable to the public.
2. The court needs to be more focused and have agreed-upon long-term priorities.
3. Court leaders want to develop comprehensive responses to trends, forces, pressures, and other demands being placed on the court.
4. The court sees benefits in using an effective, proven management tool to determine a desired future and develop a roadmap for bringing about organizational change and improvements.
5. The court wants a written document that communicates its long-term strategic direction, goals, priorities, and strategies to judges, court staff, stakeholders, court users, and the community.
6. The court wants to involve a wide range of people in determining its long-term direction, goals, priorities, and strategies.
7. There are clear and articulated benefits to be gained by doing strategic planning and having a strategic plan.
8. It is important to help judges, court administrators, managers, and staff see and understand the big picture – that the court is a complex organization and one part of a larger justice and legal system.
9. The court wants to make enhanced budget decisions, have a sound rationale for its budget, and align its budget and the day-to-day work of judges and staff with its highest priorities.