



Brainstorming and Strategic Planning Guide

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." -Wizard of Oz.

This guide contains some suggested steps and methods organizations use in strategic planning and brainstorming. You will need a comfortable room with tables and chairs and space to move around. It also helps if the room is one that has plenty of wall space that can be used to tape sheets of paper that will come out of the planning process. Supplies needed include computer technology or at least one 27 x 33 inch easel pad, markers for writing on the large sheets of paper, masking tape, 4 x 6 inch pads of colored Post-it notes (one per person), and felt-tip pens (one per person).

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce decisions and actions that guide and shape what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it (Bryson, 1995).

Strategic planning is done with a group that may use a facilitator and recorder to facilitate the gathering of information. It is important to make sure that all members with a vested interest are invited to participate and allowed to express their thoughts.

Facilitator (Namken and Rapp, 1997)

The facilitator must know the strategic planning process. The facilitator's role is to lead the group and help make the group discussion easier. The facilitator should be perceived as impartial and neutral. The facilitator assists in planning the agenda, setting up equipment, and maintaining the climate of the meeting. The facilitator establishes the ground rules for the meeting, maintains the group focus, encourages participation, and works to create group synergy. The facilitator leads the process, suggests ways to proceed, finds and defines points of agreement and disagreement, and restates comments through active listening, but does not evaluate ideas as good or bad. The facilitator should write down a brief description of the problem - the

facilitator should take control of the session, initially defining the problem to be solved with any criteria that must be met, and then keeping the session on course.

Recorder

The recorder works as a team with the facilitator. The recorder's job is to capture basic ideas on large sheets of paper or using a computer with projection capabilities to project keyed ideas. The recorder should sit in front and to one side of the room. The recorder remains quiet except to ask the facilitator for clarification or to ask the person speaking if the written points are accurate. The recorder lists points of discussion on the large sheets and posts or projects them on the wall for everyone to see.

<i>Hints for the recorder:</i>	Hardware Needed:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen for key words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large flipchart, computer with projection capability, or pad of newsprint.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write in large or key in large 1 1/2-inch letters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easel for holding the flipchart or pad.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abbreviate words or phrases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several different colored marker pens.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vary the choice of colors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafting tape.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use bullets, dots, arrows or stars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name tags or cards.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave margins for making notes at a later time. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut tape beforehand for use in posting the note sheets. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't be afraid to misspell. 	

Brainstorming (Namken and Rapp, 1997)

Brainstorming is a problem-solving technique. It is not a part of strategic planning, but is a “tool” used throughout the planning process. It is an important group technique to learn. At different points in the planning sessions, the facilitator may engage the group in a brainstorming session.

A brainstorming session requires a facilitator, a brainstorming space and something on which to write ideas, such as a white-board a flip chart or software tool. The facilitator's responsibilities include guiding the session, encouraging participation and writing ideas down. Brainstorming works best with a varied group of people. Participants should come from various departments across the organization and have different backgrounds. Even in specialist areas, outsiders can bring fresh ideas that can inspire the experts. There are numerous approaches to brainstorming, but the traditional approach is generally the most effective because it is the most energetic and openly collaborative, allowing participants to build on each others' ideas. Creativity exercises, relaxation exercises or other fun activities before the session can help participants relax their minds so that they will be more creative during the brainstorming session. Brainstorming stimulates creativity and brings out ideas that might otherwise be overlooked. It is a way to generate as many ideas as possible, without judgment. These can be related to problems, causes, or solutions. Here are a few rules that apply to brainstorming.

1. The facilitator should review the topic of the brainstorm using "why", "how", or "what" questions.
2. Everyone should think about the question silently for a few moments. Each person might want to jot down his/her ideas on a sheet of paper.
3. Everyone suggests ideas by calling them out. Another way is to go around the room and have each person read an idea from his/her list until all ideas have been written on the board or flipchart. (Note: The facilitator in charge of the brainstorming session should be enforcing the rules.)
4. Speaker may not be interrupted. No criticism or comments are allowed, either positive or negative. This includes body language, laughing, sighing, etc. Don't even groan, frown, or laugh. Do not criticize or judge. All ideas are equally valid at this point.
5. Turn the imagination loose. All ideas are acceptable, no matter how strange, silly or far out they may seem. Combine, improve, and relate to previous ideas. Build on others ideas. Be creative. The more ideas the better because at this point you don't know what might work.
6. Keep all the generated ideas visible. As a flip chart page becomes full, remove it from the pad and tape it to a wall as that it is visible. This "combined recollection" is helpful for creating new ideals. Write ideas exactly as stated, without paraphrasing.
7. Twenty or more ideas should be generated in a **10-** to **15-** minute period. Set a time limit for the brainstorming.
8. Absolutely no discussion takes place during the brainstorming activity. Talking about the ideas will take place after brainstorming is complete.
9. Evaluate later, not during the brainstorming session. Review for clarity, then combine, rewrite, add, or eliminate as decided by the group. Condense to a handful of ideas chosen to be most useful.

Hints for success in brainstorming:

- Encourage participation by all members of the group
- Give participants ample time to “think through suggestions.
- Go “round robin”. Get active participation from the whole team. Most people require at least 7 seconds of thought before responding to or offering a statement.
- Take breaks often to revitalize the thinking process.
- Don't ask to speak, just speak.
- Keep your talk brief and on the issue.
- Be careful of the tone of your voice. Speak in an easy conversational manner.

- Listen attentively to all speakers.
- Don't interrupt other speakers.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't use killer phrases such as: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead, use:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ we've tried that before; ○ we've never done that before; ○ the members won't go for it; ○ good idea, but; ○ it's too difficult, complicated, hard, etc.; ○ that takes too much time; ○ it costs too much; ○ it's a waste of time, money, resources, personnel, etc.; ○ that's good enough; ○ alright in theory; ○ we don't have the people, room, money, resources, etc.; ○ it won't work; ○ it can't be done; ○ it's too radical a change; ○ our members won't accept that; ○ we are too small, big, etc.; ○ that's not our policy; ○ no one communicates; ○ we don't have the expertise; ○ well, who else has tried it; ○ that's not our problem; ○ it can't be any better; ○ that's the dumbest idea I've ever heard; ○ we can't. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ how can we make it better; ○ we can be the first; ○ look at it from this angle; ○ great idea; ○ necessity is the mother of invention; ○ we'll reevaluate priorities; ○ we learned from the experience; ○ we can make it work; ○ think of the possibilities; ○ the investment will be worth it; ○ we'll get a jump on the competition; ○ let's network with those that have the expertise; ○ there's always room for improvement; ○ maybe there's something we can cut; ○ temporary space is an option; ○ we'll never know until we try; ○ we can sublet it out; ○ let's try one more time; ○ it will be a challenge; ○ let's open the communication channels; ○ here are some alternatives; ○ let's take a chance; ○ let's educate our members; ○ we're the right size for this project; ○ anything's possible; ○ maybe we can try; ○ another suggestion can be; ○ we'll take responsibility; ○ that's the best idea I've ever heard; ○ we can.

Selecting a Solution (Clark, 2000)

- When you are sure the brainstorming session is over, it is time to select a solution.
- Once you have finished brainstorming, go through the results, combine ideas as much as possible, but only when the original contributors agree. and begin evaluating the responses. Some initial qualities to look for when examining the responses include
 - looking for any answers that are repeated or similar.
 - grouping like concepts together.
 - eliminating responses that definitely do not fit.
 - Now that you have narrowed your list down some, discuss the remaining responses as a group.
- Number all of the ideas.
- Each member votes on the ideas by making a list of the numbers of the ideas he/she thinks are important or should be discussed further. This list should contain no more than one third of the total number of ideas.
- After counting the votes, cross out ideas with only one or two votes. Then vote again until only a few ideas remain(i.e., 3 or 4). If there is no clear-cut winner, then vote again or discuss the remaining ideas and determine which idea best answers the original question.

- Note that they only have one vote per generated ideal
 - Write the vote tallies next to the ideal. You can use a different color than the ideal to help it stand out
 - Once the voting is completed, delete all items with no votes
 - Next, look for logical breaks. For example, if you have several items with 5 or 6 votes, and no 3 or 4 and only a couple of 1 and 2, then retain only the 5 and 6 votes.
 - The group can help to decide the breaking point. Now, it is time to vote again. Each person gets half number of votes as there are ideals left.
 - For example if you narrowed the number of generated ideals down to 20, then each person gets 10 votes (if it is a odd number, round down). Each person will keep track of his or her votes.
 - The recorder should again tally the votes next to the ideal, only this time use a different color Continue this process of elimination until you get down to about 5 ideals.
 - At this point, the process may become somewhat messy, and members of the planning team should feel free to move around, write on the large sheet, post more Post-its, move them around, and so on. Also, having members identify interim steps (these can be listed with smaller-sized Post-its) is very useful at this point. Some groups may also use markers to draw lines between some of the Post-its and to add information to them (be sure the markers don't bleed through to the wall).
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Building Consensus (McDowell, 1999)

When working in a group it is important that all members of the group play a role. While the simple *majority rules* concept works for our nation, in smaller groups it could leave members feeling slighted or out of the loop. Consensus is a strategy that involves everyone playing a role in the decision making of the group. In order for this to be successful it is important to be open to compromise!

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary the definition of consensus is:

1. a : general agreement b : the judgment arrived at by most or all of those concerned
2. group solidarity in sentiment and belief
- 3.

Guidelines

- Trust each other. This is not a competition; everyone must not be afraid to express their ideas and opinions.
- Make sure everyone understands the topic/problem. While building a consensus make sure everyone is following, listening to, and understanding each other.
- All members should contribute their ideas and knowledge related to the subject.
- Stay on the task.
- You may disagree, that is OK and healthy. However, you must be flexible and willing to give something up to reach an agreement.
- Separate the issue from the personalities. This is not a time to disagree just because you don't like someone.
- Spend some time on this process. Being quick is not a sign of quality. The thought process needs to be drawn out some.

Procedure

1. Agree on your objectives for the task/project, expectations, and rules (see guidelines above).
2. Define the problem or decision to be reached by consensus.
3. Figure out what must be done to reach a solution.
4. Brainstorm possible solutions.
5. Discuss pros and cons of the narrowed down list of ideas/solutions.
6. Adjust, compromise, and fine tune the agreed upon idea/solution so *all* group members are satisfied with the result.
7. Make your decision. If a consensus isn't reached, review and/or repeat steps one through six.
8. Once the decision has been made, act upon what you decided.

The Affinity Diagram (National School Boards Association, 2007)

The affinity diagram is a general planning tool. It is a creative process that helps you to identify and gather large amounts of information, ideas, opinions, or issues and organize them in a relatively short amount of time.

A finished affinity diagram looks like the picture below:

Theme	Community Involvement	Ongoing Tech Support
Idea	Tech Use Survey	One professional/building
Idea	Open House	Students as Tech Support
Idea	Include Community Members in Teams	Regular Professional Development Using Tech

The affinity diagram is used when:

- You need to sift through large volumes of information.
- You want new patterns of information to rise to the surface.
- Issues seem too large or complex to grasp.

To create an affinity diagram:

- Assemble a team who is knowledgeable about the issue to be considered.
- Prepare the room and acquire supplies (one 3"x5" post-it notepad per person; butcher paper or flip chart paper; markers).
- Phrase the issue in the form of a question, get agreement from the group and write it on the butcher paper.
- Individually answer the question by recording one idea per post-it note using nouns and verbs.
- Randomly display the completed post-it notes on the butcher paper.
- Silently read all post-it notes and when done, move like ideas into groupings.
- Read all grouped ideas as a group and identify the major theme.
- Draw lines around each group to connect with header cards.

The finished affinity diagram helps a group identify lots of ideas and come to agreement on those ideas in a relatively short amount of time. The header cards form the consensus on the themes of the ideas generated from the team.

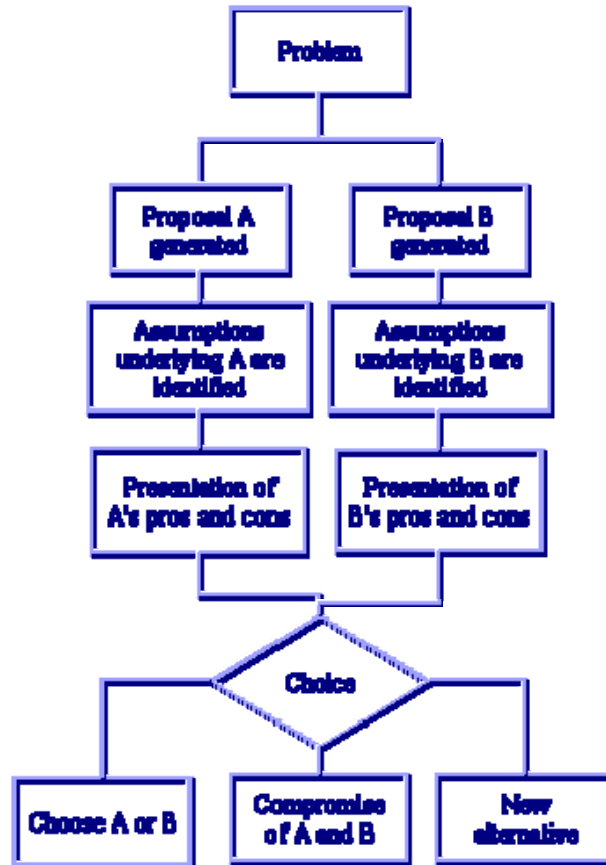
(These materials are excerpted from the Washington State School Directors' Association's "Passport to Leadership" program.)

Dialectic Decision Making (Clark, 2000)

The dialectic decision method (DDM) traces its roots back to Socrates and Plato. It helps to overcome such problems as converging too quickly on one solution while overlooking others, participants' dislike of meetings, incomplete evaluations, and the failure to confront tough issues. This process helps the members to better understand the proposals along with their pros and cons. The main disadvantage is the tendency to forge a compromise in order to avoid choosing sides. The steps of DDM are:

- Issue a clear statement of the problem to be solved.
- Two or more competing proposals are generated.
- Members identify the explicit or implicit assumptions that underlie each proposal.
- The team then breaks into advocacy sub, who examine and argue the relative merits of their positions
- The group reassembles and makes a decision:
 - embrace one of the alternatives
 - forge a compromise
 - generate a new proposal

The process looks like this:



Mission Statement

Look at the current mission statement, if one exists. Find out where the areas of consensus are and where there are differences. There is a "process" benefit to hashing over an organization's mission statement as well. In the course of discussion and debate, new members are introduced to nuances of an organization's mission and changes in the environment, and old members refresh their understanding of both. As a result, the group will have confidence that the mission statement which emerges (whether it is a new statement or a rededication to the old mission statement) is genuinely an articulation of commonly held ideas.

Groups are good at many things, but one of them is not writing. Have group discussions about big ideas and concepts and then let one or two individuals draft and redraft the wording before submitting a reworked version for the group to respond to. It is important to circulate the draft mission statement a few times to all stakeholders. In addition the group may seek an outside opinion from someone unfamiliar with the program to see how easily the mission statement can be understood. Keep refining the mission statement until you have a version that everyone can actively support.

SWOT--This method could be adapted to use for setting program goals and objectives. (Lyddon, 1994)

"SWOT" (pronounced swat) stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This is a key part of strategic planning because it examines the organization itself and the external and future environment of the organization. **Strengths and weaknesses** refer to the organization itself-they are akin to assets and liabilities. They are current, that is, they exist now. **Opportunities and threats** exist outside the organization and/or they refer to the future.

<u>Brainstorming Guidelines</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• try to get as many ideas out quickly• hitchhike-generate or spin off on another idea• do not criticize, either through comments or body language• do not "justify" or explain• have the mindset that there are no "bad" ideas

Suggested Method. One way to get information about these quickly is to brainstorm. The leader should remind participants that brainstorming means not making judgments because those will come later. Participants should just speak what is on their minds, piggybacking on something someone else might have said earlier. There will be time later to screen out some of the duplicates, and even the "dumb" ideas.

If the group is small (about 10-12 people), this can be done by brainstorming on each item one at a time (strengths, weaknesses, then opportunities, and finally threats). Have the leader write the items on sheets of easel pad paper as they are brainstormed.

If the group is large (more than 12 people), divide the group into four smaller groups. Give each small group a sheet of easel pad paper, and assign each group a name (e.g., group #1 , group #2).

Assign a SWOT item (e.g., group #1 works on strengths, and so on) to each small group. Have the members of the group brainstorm on their item for about 15 minutes. Then have the leader announce to the groups that they should rotate to another item. So group #1 would brainstorm about weaknesses, group #2 would brainstorm about opportunities, and so on. Have each group spend another five minutes on that item and add or alter what is already on the previous group's easel pad paper. Have them spend five minutes working on the easel pad paper. Then have them rotate again, and yet again until all participants have reviewed all four SWOT items.

After the SWOT items have all been listed, have the group as a whole discuss them, add more information, and clarify them. Have someone take careful notes at this point to ensure careful records of the information that comes out of this part of the process.

Finally, give 12 dots to each person, three each for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Have the individuals use the dots to vote on the three most important or most serious S, W, O, or T. Following the voting, have the group further discuss the results. It is likely as well that additional information will be needed, including some research to fully understand the specifics of some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats. Have one or more people assigned to conduct this research outside the organization's meetings and bring the results back to the group for further discussion. This research might include asking stakeholders in the organization about their opinions.

Delphi Decision Making (Clark, 2000)

In Delphi decision groups, a series of questionnaires are sent to selected respondents (Delphi group). The group does not meet face-to-face. All communication is normally in writing (normally letters or email). Members of the groups are selected because they are experts or they have relevant information. Steps include:

- Members are asked to share their assessment and explanation of a problem or predict a future state of affairs
- Replies are gathered, summarized, and then fed back to all the group members.
- Members then make another decision based upon the new information.
- The process may be repeated until the responses converge satisfactory.

The success of this process depends upon the member's expertise and communication skill. Also, each response requires adequate time for reflection and analysis. The major merits of the Delphi process is:

- Elimination of interpersonal problems
- Efficient use of expert's time.
- Diversity of ideals.
- Accuracy of solutions and predictions.

Brainstorming Guide Resources

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