

Elements of successful planning

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1. Plans need to be organic, coming from the organization, not imposed by consultants or anyone else. Plans that are developed in a vacuum, by people (including consultants!) who have no ongoing connection to the organization and/or the community, will die on the vine.

2. Part of planning is expressing and testing the implicit strategy already at work in an organization. Organizations make strategic choices all the time – who they hire, how they allocate funds, etc. But we rarely think about these decisions in strategic terms. Planning needs to start with those decisions and evaluate their implications.

3. Feasible, realistic, competitive plans are grounded in both your assets and your core competencies. Plans need to start with what you have, know, or can do. Organizations should understand and evaluate those strengths.

4. But good planning takes place when you put everything on the table. Organizations rarely have the time to think expansively, to ask “what if?” Good planning is open-minded, creative, bold and audacious. This is the time to dream and imagine what the organization might be.

5. Plans and organizations which are egocentric don't thrive in the market-focused economy. Cultural organizations are often focused on the internals rather than looking outward for the needs and interests of audiences. While we all want visitors, we're so ambivalent about being too popular, we often cut the public out of planning. Similarly, many plans are naïve about the competitive environment.

6. If a plan isn't focused on a few, challenging, achievable goals, which truly act as a “yardstick,” it won't do its job.

In the end, being “strategic” means making choices: picking a goal and marshalling your resources towards that goal. Plans shouldn't mean more activity, but more purposeful activity. This is the hard part, but it is achievable with

- A good process, which includes many voices, and is well-facilitated.
- Good research that identifies strong opportunities.
- Discipline, to keep from being distracted from the goal.
- A strong financial plan that supports success.