

Why should your association have a strategic plan?

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A strategic plan has many benefits for helping associations to remain relevant, and make members feel good about belonging. Here are some of them:

- **Defines your purpose and sets goals that match.** Everything in the association's work is aligned with a plan that is based on an agreed-upon purpose and direction, and that direction is one that everyone knows about and follows.
- **Gives direction to leadership/committees.** Instead of coming up with their own agendas for that year, which may or may not be based on relevance to member needs or association resources, a strategic planning process evaluates all of this and helps guide committees to work on coordinated programs and services that members need to help them in their business. It also can shorten those long board meetings where everything must be approved each time a new idea comes up, as assignments to committees are made at the beginning of the year, empowering those groups to do what it takes to complete those tasks.
- **Lets members know who you are and where you're going.** Members are frequently known to say: *what does the association do, anyway?* A written plan with clearly stated goals and objectives not only gives members a road map but can also motivate some new volunteers to help on programs that interest them!
- **Measures your success and provides accountability.** The often-heard statement about one way to reach your goals is not to have any really rings true here. If associations don't have written goals, the chances are far better those goals won't be achieved because there is no accountability and no way to measure success. A plan with measurable goals and a reporting process goes a long way to cure this problem. Most real estate practitioners set goals for themselves, and associations should be no different. Plus, being able to show members what the association has accomplished that year also makes them feel better when they send in their annual dues.
- **Allows for effective use of association resources.** Sometimes, and especially during economic downturns, current programs and services need to be reduced or plans for new ones moved into the next year or so. The priorities identified in a plan helps to provide direction when this happens. A plan can also identify what committees may need to be formed or eliminated or if the current staff resources are adequate.
- **Builds teamwork and stronger relationships with staff and volunteers.** When everyone is on the same page and working toward the same goals, cohesive relationships are more likely. And, there is less confusion about priorities!
- **Provides continuity.** Each year, a new president comes on board with their own ideas about what constitutes success. Many of these ideas are fantastic and worthy of developing into programs or services for members. Some of them, however, take longer than a year to put together and implement effectively – if the next president isn't excited about that idea and has one of her own, that great idea dies and a new project begins. A multi-year plan allows for continuity and ongoing work on a program that the association has collectively approved through the planning process.
- **Plans for the future.** Not only does a plan do all of the above, but it should address some "what ifs" and future possibilities that face both the real estate and association business. One that comes to mind right now is changing demographics – especially the generational changes we see in both real estate consumers and members alike. The volunteer pool is shrinking based on boomer retirements and the lack of younger members who want to volunteer, for example. Another is whether an association can or should continue to rely on considerable revenue from their MLS when MLSs are regionalizing, privatizing, and considering other avenues. Associations need to be planning for these changes now, before it's too late.