

Strategic Planning and Goal Setting

Leadership Toolbox

Podcast Transcript

Centennial Student Union & Student Activities

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Welcome to the Student Activities Online Leadership Toolbox. My name is John Bulcock, and I am the Assistant Director of Student Activities for Greek Life and Off-Campus Housing at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am going to be your podcast guide. This podcast is about strategic planning and goal setting.

According to Carter McNamara, “strategic planning determines where an organization is going over the next year or more, how it's going to get there and how it'll know if it got there or not. The focus of a strategic plan is usually on the entire organization.”

The most common type of planning is goals-based planning, which starts with a focus on the organization's mission (and vision and/or values), goals to work toward the mission, strategies to achieve the goals, and action planning or the determination of who will do what and by when.”

Your organization needs to know where it is, where it wants to be, and how it will get from point A to point B. Getting to point B needs to be congruent with your group's overall mission and purpose, and it needs to be realistic.

McNamara provides several key steps to developing a strategic plan.

Draft a Mission Statement. There may already be one of these or a vision statement already crafted. This will state the purpose of the organization and will drive the goals that will be developed later.

Drafting a values statement will help us evaluate the overall priorities or principles that guide how you want your program to operate?

McNamara suggests conducting both internal and external analyses of the organization. I prefer to group this suggestion together and suggest a SWOT analysis that looks at the group's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities for the group and the threats it may face. This can really aid in the identification of priorities that needs to be done.

Identifying strategic issues involves taking a look at the big picture. What are the things the group needs to address? With what urgency will the group focus on the strategic issues?

Identifying Goals and Strategies takes the identification of issues to the next step. Goals need to be specific and should tackle the priorities, directly. Putting a timeline to the goals and identifying who is responsible for completion is very important.

A strategic plan is a tool that, when used correctly, can be viewed and understood by many people. It provides a roadmap, and it can be used as an accountability tool. In student organizations, you will not want to look at a plan that is longer than a year or two. The shelf-life on these programs can be short in student groups because of high turnover in leadership.

McNamara says that one of the biggest problems with plans is that they are sometimes shelved and never used again. Part of this is due to the misperception that they are set-in-stone directions and that they can't be modified. When you develop a plan, do so with the knowledge that it should be dynamic and change as the organization's needs change or as resource availability changes. Inflexibility will cause the plan to become stagnant and will stunt creativity and innovation in your organization.

Goal setting is part of the strategic planning process, but it is often seen as an ok stand-alone activity. While some groups choose to do this, it can cause a need to frequently update the goals. Less planning can sometimes go into goals that really need to be thought out well.

Often times, we are tempted to set goals that sound something like this:

“I want to commit more time to studying and get a better GPA.” While this sounds nice, there are no teeth to this goal-no standards to meet. Goals need to be SMART.

S=Specific

M=Measurable

A=Achievable

R=Realistic

T=Timely

Goals that are SMART are easier to interpret, and we can more effectively be held accountable to them. Something like this is a SMART goal: “During the Fall semester, I will spend 3 hours per day studying or doing class work in the library. Doing this will help me achieve a 3.0 GPA.”

This goal is specific; it gives a particular number which we will know whether or not we have met. It is certainly achievable and realistic, and it gives a particular timeframe for accomplishment.

Strategic planning and goal setting helps a group chart its future path, and it provides for greater officer and group accountability. It does not have to be a complex and difficult process, but it should be taken seriously if it is going to have the greatest impact.

This podcast was presented by Student Activities at Minnesota State University, Mankato. We hope that you have found the information helpful. Find other leadership podcasts at www.mnsu.edu/activities/toolbox.