

How much does it cost to develop a strategic plan?

By:

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Strategic planning usually reaches beyond traditional long-range planning. In addition to developing a roadmap for the future, the goal of strategic planning is to engage the planners, the decision makers, the stakeholders, and others important to the organization in a dialogue that will produce a series of decisions that ensure the viability of the organization. Solid strategic planning anticipates the inevitability of change, and focuses on the organization's mission, while producing a plan that is realistic, comprehensive, and integrated across all organizational functions.

Whew... now you're thinking that this is going to be really expensive! As the saying goes, *not necessarily*. There are several methods that can be employed to develop a plan for your organization. The most common scenario is to develop a three-year plan, with an annual operating plan that supports it. Here are the key questions that an organization needs to ask itself in order to arrive at a plan that *challenges* but is still achievable:

1. What is our long-term *vision*? What is it that we are trying to achieve? Your vision should inspire the organization to reach "higher" – and it should be aspirational, perhaps even "just out of reach."
2. Is our mission still viable? Does it match our organization vision? A planning discussion should validate that our mission is, in effect, what we do every day to work toward that organizational vision.
3. What are the goals that we need to establish to move us closer to our vision? Organizations should have no more than 3-4 goals: each goal will have strategies that support its achievement.
4. The operational side of the plan, developed annually from the strategic plan, will include timeframes for each strategy, the human and financial resources that will be required to achieve the strategies, the "success measure" that everyone can aim for, and who is responsible for the strategy that you have outlined. This process also gives you a methodology to drive your annual budget.

You are still wondering how much this all costs... the answer depends on how you choose to put your plan together and how much time it will take – the cost can literally range from \$5,000 to \$50,000 – depending on what your organizational needs are and how complex a process you are requiring of the consultant. Organizations can develop their own plans with skilled staff and board members, or they can hire a consultant to help guide the plan’s development. If you are going to hire an outside planning consultant, be clear about what your organization needs, ask your trusted colleagues in other non-profits who they have worked with for this type of process, and ask for proposal outlines from consultants (based on your ideas about what you need.) In your organizational budget, include a line item for planning and follow up on that planning process.