

Strategic Planning Checklist

Updated: February 2023

The Strategic Planning Checklist gives libraries a detailed look at the steps to create their own strategic plan. This checklist includes information on how to prepare for the planning process, how to gather information, how to conduct a SWOT analysis, how to write a strategic and implementation plan, and how to conclude the process.

Step 1: Pre-Planning and the Planning Team

- Action Item 1. **Create a strategic planning team or committee and choose a chair** that will lead the process, such as the library director or board chair. The committee should be a group of 6 - 12 members who may include:
 - Library Board members or trustees
 - Library Director and key management staff
 - Representatives from Friends and/or Foundation Boards
 - Other key community stakeholders familiar with the library
- Action Item 2. **Create a list of community organizations to include** in the strategic planning process.
- Action Item 3. **Discuss process and expectations of outcomes and lay out a projected timeline** of the project. This typically looks like...
 - Data audit (3 – 4 weeks)
 - Community survey (4 – 5 weeks)
 - RRP retreat invitation process (4 – 6 weeks)
 - Development of strategic plan and goal tracking worksheet (2 – 3 weeks)
 - Development of implementation plan (1 – 2 weeks)
 - Final approvals and marketing guidance (2 – 4 weeks)
- Action Item 4. **The facilitator will review key documents**, including:
 - The library's current strategic plan or any other plans (staffing, technology, etc.)
 - Relevant city or county plans
 - Census data
 - Other critical information that will inform the planning process, such as budgets, library trend data, and an organizational chart

The role of the planning team is to advise and help direct the planning process, identify and recruit stakeholders to participate in the visioning retreat, assist the facilitator with finalizing a community survey, and help finalize the strategic plan.

Team members should expect to meet 2 – 4 times for 1.5 – 2 hour meetings over about 4 – 6 months, as well as respond to occasional emails.

Step 2: Data Gathering and Community Input

- **Action Item 1. Gather library data and trends for the last 3 – 5 years.** This includes...
 - Legal service area
 - Number of branches (including central)
 - Hours of operation per week (system wide)
 - Operating revenue
 - Operating expenditures
 - Governing type (ex: municipal, county, district)
 - Number of cardholders
 - Recorded patron visits
 - Librarian staff FTE (degreed or otherwise)
 - Total staffing FTE
 - Physical collection maintained
 - Electronic materials available
 - Print circulation
 - E-circ
 - Interlibrary loan figures (“to” and “from”)
 - Number of programs
 - Average program attendance
 - Friends and Foundation budgets and support
- **Action Item 2. Gather US Census data and updates and the companion American Community Survey** for demographic information. Some critical community demographics to review include:
 - Service area population, and % change in the last 20 years
 - Race/ethnicity percentages
 - Poverty level, and poverty level for children (and sometimes poverty levels by race/ethnicity)
 - Household income
 - Educational attainment level (percent with college degree)
 - % single individual households (a good measure of social isolation)
 - Age breakdown – especially % of children and % of seniors
 - % households with children
- **Action Item 3. Conduct a community survey.**
- **Action Item 4. Conduct a staff survey online.** This should mostly have qualitative questions.
- **Action Item 5. Synthesize and analyze survey results.**
- **Action Item 6. Hold key stakeholder interviews** with the members of the governing or funding body and leaders of important community groups.
- **Action Item 7. Invite individuals to participate** in focus groups.
 - Some ideas for people/groups to invite include...
 - Municipal/County, or other, public officials

- Library Friends and/or Foundation leaders
- Local school leaders and one or two teachers
- Business leaders – from varied businesses or Chamber of Commerce
- Representatives from other cultural or arts organizations
- Representatives from social service agencies
- Other governmental department heads, such as police and parks
- Religious leaders
- Representatives from key civic groups, such as Rotary or Kiwanis
- Individuals from the local philanthropic community
- Colleges or universities – if in the area
- Nearby military bases – if in the area
- Local labor leaders
- Homeschool community – if significant in the area and library users
- Include representatives from certain demographics important in the community and to the library
- Other groups that the planning team identifies as locally important
- Action Item 8. **Figure out focus group logistics.** Determine the following for the retreat...
 - Date and location
 - Time (usually takes about 1 – 2 hours, most often done on an evening or weekend)
 - Consider providing snacks
- Action Item 9. **Facilitate the focus groups.**
 - The person leading the focus groups – typically the library director or committee chair – will ask 5 – 10 pre-written questions to the group.
 - Allow everyone time to speak and ask follow-up questions as necessary.
 - If certain people are monopolizing the session, gently remind them that others want to share, or encourage another person to share.
- Action Item 10. **Present summary survey report.**

Offer both online and paper versions of the community survey.

The community survey should cover the perceptions of and satisfactions with the library and its various services, future desires and needs for library services, and basic demographics of the survey participants.

The community survey should be no more than 15 – 20 questions and should take no more than 10 – 15 minutes to complete.

Publicize the community survey on the library website, on social media, with signs in the library, by notifying Friends and foundation members, through press releases, through city or county agencies and through community groups and churches.

The goal of the community survey is to gather input from a cross-section of community members, test for significant issues or concerns, and begin to identify strategic areas for further examination at a planning retreat.

The stakeholder interviews last about a half hour each.

Step 3: The SWOT Analysis

- Action Item 1. **Review the data gathered in Step 2.** The strategic planning committee will review the data that was gathered through Step 2.
- Action Item 2. **Complete a SWOT analysis.** The committee chair or library director facilitates a session with the strategic planning committee to identify the significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats/challenges that face the library. This session typically lasts 1 – 2 hours.
 - Strengths and weakness are internal to the library organization and staff.
 - Opportunities and threats/challenges are external to the library organization and staff.

Step 4: Creating the Strategic Plan

- Action Item 1. **Draft the strategic plan.**
 - The facilitator(s) and library director or committee chair draft the initial strategic plan shortly after the SWOT analysis. At a minimum, the plan should be nicely formatted in a Word or pdf document. The draft plan typically includes...
 - A cover/title page
 - Mission and vision statements (new or old)
 - Four to five goals
 - Three to five strategies under each goal
 - A list of the planning team members
 - A list of the governing body that approves the plan
 - Names of the planning team members
 - Names of the library board or other governing body members
 - A goal tracking worksheet
- Action Item 2. **Finalize and approve the strategic plan.**
 - The facilitator reviews the draft plan with the library director.
 - The strategic planning committee has one final meeting to work through the draft and address any major changes.
 - The facilitator then makes changes and sends out the plan, making any other edits until the planning committee agrees that it is ready to be approved.
 - Present the plan to the library board or governing body with a recommendation for approval.
- Action Item 3. **Create a goal tracking worksheet** to track the progress of the strategic plan goals.
 - Create a one-to-two-page document with color coding or other graphics to indicate advancement on each goal area. One of the most common formats is to simply list each goal and strategy in the plan and then indicate by red, green, or yellow (dots, colored text, colored blocks in a spreadsheet) whether there has been no action (red), is completed (green), or in process (yellow).

The process of finalizing and approving the plan is different for each library and depends largely on the process for approval by the governing body.

It is recommended that the board review the goal tracking worksheet for five minutes at every meeting. By making the goal tracking worksheet report a regular, on-going report to the board, it also serves as a reminder to the library director and lead staff to check in regularly on the plan and move forward on any areas that are lagging behind.

Step 5: Implementation Plan

- **Action Item 1. Facilitate and draft the implementation plan.**
 - Host an implementation retreat.
 - For a small staff, the implementation retreat might include all staff. For a larger library, it should include all department leaders and selected other representatives from the staff. It is common that this group includes 10-15 individuals.
 - This retreat will likely take about three hours.
 - The facilitator will draft an implementation plan based off of the retreat.
 - The facilitator and library director will review the implementation plan and make any necessary edits.

It does work well to present the draft implementation plan or template on a laptop and project it on a screen, so that everyone can see and respond to changes as they are made. If this is done, it is helpful to have someone other than the facilitator working on the laptop to make changes or edits.

The implementation plan is structured as a staff working document and not intended for board review, or approval, as it deals with operational issues outside the responsibility of the board.

Concluding the RRP Process

- **Action Item 1. Follow-up with the strategic plan stakeholders.**
 - The plan should be put into action through the implementation plan; the governing body regularly should check in on the progress of the plan; and the implementation plan should be updated periodically.
 - The library should also keep the community members involved in the process engaged in the long-term future of the library.
 - Participants should all be sent a copy of the final plan (via email or mail) with another thank you for their participation.
- **Action Item 2. Spread community awareness** and market the plan.
 - Publicizing the plan and goals is on the library's website, print, and social media materials.
 - The local newspaper or other local media should be contacted to do a story on the plan, particularly highlighting any new or perhaps unexpected goals – especially if the plan includes any large initiatives that will affect the community – such as the prospect of a capital project for the library or a major literacy initiative.