

But is it *Strategic* Planning?

Strategic planning is common to many organizations. Every three to five years, the board and staff identify goals and programs to be accomplished. But is it *strategic*?

Social justice organizations considering strategic planning have a big challenge. The changes they seek - equity of opportunity, racial justice, environmental health and respect, economic justice, and more - are not achieved in three or five years. It can take several generations to see noticeable progress. In the face of such daunting odds, many organizations opt for identifying doable campaigns. The trick is that while the campaigns could make progress towards the ultimate goals, they can also be one-time victories (or losses) that don't necessarily contribute to the ultimate desired change. Planning could be about winning the immediate goal but it may not be strategic.

Sometimes organizations call for *strategic planning* that covers an even shorter time span of one-to-two years. A plan of such a short duration is more likely to be a series of tasks to accomplish the established or desired work load than a fundamental review of what's important. At best, it might set the organization up for real strategic work.

A plan is strategic if it establishes an organizational **true north**. From there programs, staffing, structure, funding sources, communication, and much more can be determined.

Other types of planning include *operational planning*--organizational short-term planning towards an established strategic direction, or *campaign planning*, which could be a multi-year component of the strategic plan.

You have a strategic planning process if you:

- Ask *why* not just *what*? Does the organization ask *why are we doing* these programs, this mix of issues, this approach, or work with these constituencies in these ways?
- Account for and attempt to influence the environment. After all, how do you do social change without taking a good look at society?
- Clearly state the organization's theory of change. How does the organization expect to achieve its aims? This is more than a series of tasks or tactics but a coherent set of beliefs about how to create the desired outcomes.
- Articulate the organization its role in the larger community of ideas, services, or products. What unique or best role does the organization play relative to others in its community?
- Align the functions, staff, culture, and competencies of the organization with the ultimate purpose. Especially for social change organizations, *how* is as important as *what*, that is, the means of creating change can reflect the change itself.
- Are willing to make tough choices. Are you willing to let go of some programs or approaches in the short term in favor of longer term results more in line with the ultimate purpose and vision?

