

## Ideas to support the implementation of the Action Plan

At this point in planning, planners are sometimes fatigued from completing the earlier phases of planning. Action planning may seem detailed and tedious compared to earlier phases of strategic planning which often seem creative in nature. Therefore, action planning is too often ignored, leaving the results of earlier stages of planning much as “castles in the air” -- useless philosophical statements with no grounding in the day-to-day realities of the organization. Meaningful stages of earlier planning become utterly useless.

For those who have an action plan in place, wasting time and energy on the planning process and then not implementing the plan is very discouraging. In the following, you'll discover how to get support for your complete implementation plan and how to avoid some common mistakes.

### *Avoiding the Implementation Pitfalls*

Because you want your action plan to succeed here are common reasons why action plans fail:

- **Lack of ownership:** The most common reason a plan fails is lack of ownership. If people don't have a stake and responsibility in the plan, it'll be business as usual for all but a frustrated few. Engaging more people will make it possible to spread the workload. Those people engaged in the implementation will feel more ownership for the plan and the changes that result.
- **Lack of communication:** The plan doesn't get communicated to participants, and they don't understand how they contribute. Share the plan within and outside of the organization. Use multiple formats, adapted to the audience - the Web, brief brochures, and detailed action plans. Update the information to reflect progress and accomplishments.
- **Getting mired in the day-to-day:** Participants, consumed by daily operating problems, lose sight of long-term goals.
- **Out of the ordinary:** The plan is treated as something separate and removed from the management process.

- **An overwhelming plan:** The goals and actions generated in the action plan are too numerous because the team failed to make tough choices to eliminate non-critical actions. Participants don't know where to begin.
- **A meaningless plan:** The vision, mission, and value statements are viewed as fluff and not supported by actions.
- **Not considering implementation:** Implementation isn't discussed in the planning process. The planning document is seen as an end in itself.
- **No progress report:** There's no method to track progress, and the plan only measures what's easy, not what's important. No one feels any forward momentum. Perform regular updates. Implementation is effective if the update contains up-to-date and comprehensive information. Data needs to be collected and reported at intervals that correspond to the program.
- **No accountability:** Accountability and high visibility help drive change. This means that each measure, objective, data source, and initiative must have an owner.
- **Lack of empowerment:** Although accountability may provide strong motivation for improving performance, participants must also have the authority, responsibility, and tools necessary to impact relevant measures. Otherwise, they may resist involvement and ownership.

### *Making Sure You Have the Support*

Often overlooked are the five key components necessary to support implementation: people, resources, structure, systems, and culture. All components must be in place in order to move from creating the plan to activating the plan.

#### **People**

The first stage of implementing your plan is to make sure to have the right people on board. The right people include those folks with required competencies and skills that are needed to support the plan. In the months following the planning process, expand employee skills through training (recruitment or new hires) to include new competencies required by the strategic plan.

## Resources

You need to have sufficient funds and enough time to support implementation. Often, true costs are underestimated or not identified. True costs can include a realistic time commitment from staff to achieve a goal, a clear identification of expenses associated with a tactic, or unexpected cost overruns by a vendor. Additionally, employees must have enough time to implement what may be additional activities that they aren't currently performing.

## Structure

Set your structure of management and appropriate lines of authority, and have clear, open lines of communication. A plan owner and regular strategy meetings are the two easiest ways to put a structure in place. Meetings to review the progress should be scheduled monthly or quarterly, depending on the level of activity and time frame of the plan.

## Systems

Both management and technology systems help track the progress of the plan and make it faster to adapt to changes. As part of the system, build milestones into the plan that must be achieved within a specific time frame. A scorecard is one tool used by many organizations that incorporates progress tracking and milestones.

## Culture

Create an environment that connects employees to the organization's mission and that makes them feel comfortable. To reinforce the importance of focusing on strategy and vision, reward success. Develop some creative positive and negative consequences for achieving or not achieving the strategy. The rewards may be big or small, as long as they lift the strategy above the day-to-day so people make it a priority.

### *Supporting members to do what they said they would*

Fortunately, there are several things you can try to ensure the implementation. It's particularly tricky in the case of volunteers, because you don't want to lean too hard on someone who is donating their time and energy to begin with. Still, you can make

it easier for members to get things done (and harder to avoid work) without acting like the mean neighbour down the street. Some of these gentle reminders include:

- **Regular phone calls** from staff members or dedicated volunteers asking others how they are doing with their tasks. This should be a supportive call, not a "are you doing what you're supposed to" call. The person calling can offer emotional support "how are you doing?" as well as see if the group member needs any other assistance. A friendly call such as this can be seen as helpful, give the member the sense that he is a very important part of the group, and serve as a great reminder to do what he said he would do.
- **Distributing the action plan in writing** to all members, with names attached to specific tasks. (Additionally, this can be a great time to ask for feedback before the plan becomes "official.")
- Making sure **timelines** (with due dates) **are complete, clear and current.**
- At **regular group meetings**, such as committee meetings or board meetings, ask members to report on accomplishing the tasks they have set out to do. Consider making this a regular part of the meeting.
- **Celebrate the accomplishment of tasks.** It's important that getting something done actually means something, and is recognized by the group as a whole.

**Follow up on the action plan regularly.** You are asking members to be accountable, and to get things done on a regular basis. If they have agreed, you should help them fulfill their commitment as best you can.

Keep track of what (and how well) you've done. Always keep track of what the group has actually done. If the community change (a new program or policy) took significant time or resources, it's also a good idea to evaluate what you have done, either formally or informally.

Keep several questions in mind for both yourself and others:

- Are we doing what we said we'd do?
- Are we doing it well?
- Is what we are doing advancing the mission?

You can address these questions informally (ask yourself, chat with friends and other people), as well as formally, through surveys and other evaluation methods.

**Producing the public version of the plan** in summary form provides public access to the action plan.

### *Difference between monitoring and evaluating*

Monitoring the plan should not be confused with evaluating the solution. Monitoring the plan helps to ensure that the solution is being implemented as expected. Evaluating the solution occurs after the plan has been implemented and provides an indication of whether the solution has rectified the problem.

### **Monitoring the plan:**

In order to monitor the plan the following questions should be asked:

- Has each step been implemented correctly?
- Has each step been implemented on time?
- Has the expected outcome materialised from the completion of each step?

Based on the answers to the above questions the following questions may need to be considered:

- Is more time required?
- Are more tasks required?
- Are more resources required?
- Was the plan realistic?
- What action needs to be taken?
- Does the plan need to change?

## Evaluating the solution:

Once the solution has been implemented its success needs to be evaluated. Evaluating the success of the solution allows the solution to be altered or changed as required. Regardless of its success or failure evaluating the solution allows lessons to be learned that can be utilised when solving a similar problem in the future.

- When evaluating a solution you need to answer the following questions:
- Where were we before the solution?
- Where are we now?
- Where are we meant to be?

By answering these questions you can identify if you have:

- Reached the desired state
- Progressed from the problem state
- Regressed from the problem state
- Remained in the problem state

Solutions can be short term or long term in achieving their outcomes. Therefore, the evaluation of a solution needs to be held at an appropriate time relative to the expected outcomes.

Adapted using the following resources:

Carter McNamara: Basics of Action Planning

(<https://managementhelp.org/strategicplanning/actionplanning.htm>)

Developing an Action Plan - Community tool box – The University of Kansas

(<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning/develop-action-plans/main>)

Erica Olsen: Strategic Implementation

(<https://onstrategyhq.com/resources/strategic-implementation/>)

Mat D. Duerden and Peter A. Witt. Journal of Extension. February 2012.  
(<https://www.joe.org/joe/2012february/a4.php>)

Monitoring and Evaluating  
([https://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/toolbox/leadership/toolbox/ip/ip\\_c13.html](https://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/toolbox/leadership/toolbox/ip/ip_c13.html))

Office of Planning and Assessment - The Pennsylvania State University  
(<http://www.opia.psu.edu/>)

This document was produced by: Fit for Life Program [Kunnossa kaiken ikää (KKI) -  
ohjelma], Finland (partner in the SPAcE EU project).

