8 THINGS

That May Be

MISSING

From Your City's Strategic Plan

ClearPoint Strategy
www.clearpointstrategy.com

8 THINGS THAT MAY BE MISSING FROM YOUR CITY'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic planning isn't really the norm among cities. At least, not the way it is with most private-sector organizations. But when a city implements a strategic plan correctly, it has the potential to create the openness and sense of community that many cities want.

If your city does have a strategic plan, it's easy to think that because you spend a good amount of time creating and implementing it, that it's going to work. But when things don't turn out the way you intended, it makes you wonder what you're doing wrong. The truth is, there are key components to a strategic plan, and if any one of them is missing, you won't see the results you're hoping for. So if you're wondering why it's so hard to execute your city's strategic plan, ask yourself, "What's missing?"

ClearPoint Strategy
www.clearpointstrategy.com

1. DO YOU HAVE A MISSION OR VISION?

First and foremost, for a strategic plan to work, you need to have vision and mission statements.

Vision statements, or mission statements, are high-level, reachable goals that are set from the very beginning of the strategic process and work as the foundation for your plan. They are a declaration of your city's long-term goals—basically, they state what you are hoping to achieve by going through the strategic planning process.

Ask yourself, "Why is it important for us to create this strategic plan?" and "Why is it important to think about where we want to be in the future?" Answering these questions will help you come up with your vision and will let everyone involved in the process be on the same page.

These statements need to be free of useless words that might create confusion or remove clarity from your goal. It needs to be a broad, overall goal, showing your picture of the city's future. Involve city staff and citizens in the process of making the vision statement, and once you've got one in mind, communicate with them about why it's important. Without this clear vision, you are basically attempting to build a house without a foundation. (It's just not going to work.)

If you didn't start your strategic planning process with a clear enough or strong enough vision statement, you may need to go back to the beginning and rethink your plan.

See how Durham, North Carolina created a new strategic plan.

2. HAVE YOU CREATED A "CHANGE AGENDA"?

A change agenda is basically where you are now vs. where you want to go. For example, your schools may be at a point where every child can succeed in every school, but you want to get to a point where you have schools specialized for children's specific skills or gifts. This would mean a shift in strategy, from all schools having the same standards to having a STEM school, a music school, or a girls' school. Another example could be that you're currently focused on reducing major crimes and felonies in your city, but you want to make a shift to focus on basic crimes.

Or, instead of being revenue-driven, you may find that you need to be mission-driven. Whatever the case, it could mean a complete change in what you're doing and how you've been thinking about your city.

A change agenda will drive how you think about your measures and your strategy map, so if you haven't come up with one, you need to.

3. DO YOU HAVE STRATEGIC THEMES?

Once you've agreed on the vision of your city and your change agenda, you can create strategic themes.

Basically, strategic themes are the 3-5 high-level goals your city is trying to accomplish. They are broad in scope, and apply to every part of the organization. They define what major strategic goals your city will pursue to achieve its vision, meaning they are the basis for your city's change. Without excelling in your themes, it's going to be really hard to carry out your vision.

When you come up with strategic themes, you have to consider other strategic elements, like the support or challenges you face. Themes also represent deliberate, strategic, directional decisions made by leadership. An example would be to have three themes, such as "safest, most family-friendly, and most business-friendly city in the state." When put together, you should be able to look at the proposed set of themes and ask, "If we excel in these areas, will we achieve our vision?" If you can't answer that question, or even ask it, then you most likely need work on your strategic themes.

See Fort Lauderdale, Florida's strategy management journey.

4. HAVE YOU CREATED STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES?

Objectives are the next step in the strategic process, and they essentially break down the vision even further. In order to create objectives, you have to identify the most critical goals in each theme. Objectives are short, concise statements that define what an organization has to do on a regular basis to achieve its vision.

For cities, objectives can be stated as action phrases or complete sentences. They can be written as informative statements, such as "We must leverage technology to connect citizens." Or, they can be written in the voice of the citizen, "My family lives in a safe neighborhood."

Objectives must be measurable, meaning there has to be at least one standard that measures the progress of the objective. They should also be specific, in order to provide a clear message into what needs to be accomplished. Objectives should be relevant and realistic, as well. This means that it needs to be consistent with the vision and something that is actually achievable within the city's capabilities and resources. Lastly, there needs to be a set time frame for completing the objective. Whether it's five months from now or five years from now, stating a time frame will help make the goal more reachable and will hold people more accountable for getting it done.

So, if you don't have specific, measurable, realistic objectives, it's time you start making some. Without them, your strategic plan isn't going to get you very far.

5. DO YOU HAVE MEASURES & TARGETS?

In order to know if you're achieving your goals, you need to be able to measure your progress. Measures are what will be tracked and change over time, and targets are what direction or speed the measure will take. A target is the level of performance or rate of improvement required for a particular measure. Targets should be observed over time to figure out what's changing (or not changing) and what should happen next. A measure should include a statement of the unit you're measuring (dollars, headcount, percentage, rating), a frequency for the measure (monthly, quarterly, annually), and a graph format to show the results (bar chart, pie chart, or a more sophisticated chart).

Being able to visualize the progress your city is making will help to better achieve the openness cities want. Citizens appreciate being able to see the progress being made, and if you can compare yourself to similar cities or other standards, it will inform citizens even more. By having measures, people will be able to see that things are happening, and will be more likely to stay on board with the plan. If you have everything we've stated so far for a strategic plan, but don't have anything to measure or show for your efforts, you won't be able to know if you're strategic plan is actually working. So make sure you have a way to keep track of your progress so you can see the results of your plan and better determine what action should take place next.

6. DO YOU HAVE INITIATIVES OR MILESTONES?

Initiatives are key action programs made to help you achieve your objectives or close the gap between your measures, performance, and targets. Basically, they are things you do in order to get an objective done. Initiatives are often known as projects, actions, or activities. They differ from objectives in that they are more specific, have stated boundaries (a beginning and an end), have a person or team assigned to accomplish them, and have a budget. Several initiatives taken together may support a specific objective or theme. It is important for a city to define the boundaries for initiatives, such as "all strategic projects over $200k in size".

It's also important for initiatives to be strategic in nature, and not just "operations as usual" projects, or projects you would be doing regardless of a strategic plan. These actions must align with your objectives in order to see positive results in your strategic plan. If you don't have initiatives or are having trouble executing them, it's time to buckle down and fix this issue.

7. DO YOU HAVE A CULTURE OF INVOLVEMENT?

Another key element to a successful strategic plan is creating a culture of change within your organization. This means involving multiple people across the entire organization, sometimes cross-functionally.

You may have a designated "strategic plan team," but it's impossible to have a successful plan if only a select group of people know about it or are working toward it. Even if city employees already have other jobs that don't include the strategic plan, involving them is a great way to spread your reach across all city departments.

By creating this culture of openness, involvement, and change, you'll find it much easier to reach the goals of your plan. So if you haven't done it yet, it's time to start.

8. DO YOU HAVE STRONG LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY?

It doesn't take an expert to know that without good leadership, you'll have a hard time seeing positive improvement in any organization, including cities. It's important to have strong leadership, as well as accountability within that leadership, in order to encourage change in the rest of the group or team. If you have people who are excited about your plan and who are willing to do what it takes to see it succeed, you'll see much better results. You also need to know that they can be held accountable for their actions in those leadership positions.

But accountability doesn't just stop at the leadership. Everyone who is involved in implementing the strategic plan will need to be accountable, because you need to know that they are all on board. This includes people at both the department and executive level. It's a good idea to appoint one or two strong people to be "champions", people who fully understand your plan and are committed to helping other people understand it, too. They can drive buy-in in the early stages of development to make sure you have the support you need.

Once you know that everyone's all-in, you can move forward with confidence and hope for a positive future city.

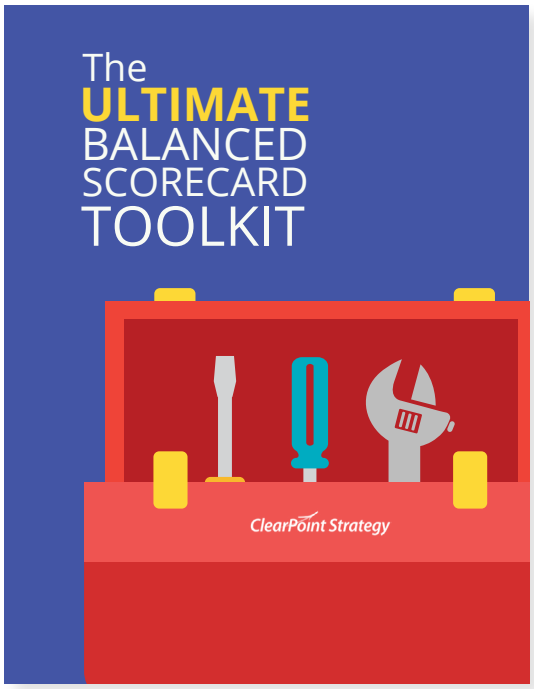
SO, WHAT'S MISSING FROM YOUR PLAN?

In order to see your city flourish, you can't let anything fall by the wayside. Now that you know what should go into your strategic plan, be proactive about it. If that requires you to make some changes, don't be afraid to do it. Because, in the future, you'll be happy you did.

So ask yourself, what's missing from my strategic plan?

Click here to talk with a ClearPoint expert who can help you understand what's missing in your organization.

ClearPoint Strategy
www.clearpointstrategy.com

Need Help With Measures & Targets?

Download Our Guide Here