



Church Planning – 4 Steps to Church Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is an important part of the creation, development and growth of any organization. Ministries that are interested in church growth are not exempt from planning.

Church planning helps the organization map out strategic steps to achieve its mission and vision.

Churches can experience a level of success without a plan, but those who invest the time and resources into developing a specific strategy and plan can achieve success at a much quicker pace.



According to Wikipedia, “Strategic planning is an organization’s process of defining its strategy or direction and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy, including its capital or people.”

4 Steps to Church Strategic Planning

1. Create a Vision, Mission and Values Statement

It is difficult to know where to focus efforts and resources without being able to articulate what it is you are trying to do. Imagine taking a vacation without first deciding where you are going or how you will get there.

The first, and arguably most important, step of the strategic planning process is to create a church vision, mission and values statement. This process allows board members and church leaders to clarify why the church exists (mission) and what the church is trying to achieve (vision).

The mission and vision is what determines strategy, planning and budgeting church resources.

2. Do (SWOT) Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a great exercise to go through because it identifies the key areas of the church that may need targeted resources as well as opportunities or opposing environmental factors that could affect church strategy.

For example, if a children's program is a strength of the church, there may need to be continued or increased resources committed to it to ensure continued development and growth.

On the other hand, if the church is located in a high crime area, there might be an opportunity to develop a youth outreach program to support that unique demographic.

The SWOT analysis process can flush out many great ideas to help target development, growth and improvements.

To begin the SWOT process, think about the following:

Strengths: Characteristics of the church that may give it an advantage over others;

Weaknesses: Characteristics of the church that may be a disadvantage as related to others;

Opportunities: Conditions outside the church that could potentially increase attendance or revenues;

Threats: Conditions outside the church that could create problems for the church.

For example:

- Strength: The church is located on a busy street and has high visibility in the community.
- Weakness: A small percentage of the church population is young families.
- Opportunities: The church is located in an area with a high population of Hispanic families.
- Threats: The church is located in a small town with an aging population.

3. Perform Gap Analysis

A gap analysis answers the question, "Where are we compared to where we want to be"? The process looks at the vision – where do we want to go – and compares it to where we are currently.

The analysis can be in relation to ministry program development, discipleship, financial viability or customer experience. All areas will be identified and targeted for strategy through the gap analysis process.

An example of a church's current state:

- The church is renting a temporary facility until it can build a permanent building;
- The church is lacking volunteer leadership;
- The church children's program is lacking weekly training curriculum;
- The church lacks a process for discipleship.

4. Write Organizational Goals

Once a SWOT and gap analysis is done, it is time to start writing goals. Goals are only as effective as the formalized process of achieving them. Many organizations use the SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely) goal process to ensure their goals are achievable. When writing a goal, filter it through the following questions:

Specific: Is the goal specific enough for clarity?

Measurable: Is there a way to measure the success of the goal?

Attainable: Is the goal truly attainable?

Realistic: Is the goal realistically written?

Timely: Is there a timeline associated to the goal to ensure a completion date?

Church Goal example:

Sample Church will develop a volunteer leadership training program and implement by 3rd quarter 20xx.

Now if we look at this example, we need to ask the questions:

- Is it specific – yes: keywords, will identify, develop and implement
- Is it measurable – yes: keywords, develop by 3rd quarter 20xx
- Is it attainable – yes: with ample resources
- Is it realistic – yes: within the allotted time-frame
- is it measurable – yes: keywords, by 3rd quarter 20xx

Now let's take this a step further and create a goal document. Unless a goal is assigned to someone and is accomplished, it is merely words on a paper. When someone is responsible for completing a goal and is managed by a structured performance management process, goals have a much better chance of being completed.

Goal (What)	Action Steps (how)	Responsible Person (who)	Due Date (when)	Status
Develop a volunteer leadership training program and implement by 3rd quarter 20XX.	Establish training needs and objectives	Tim Smith	Oct 31	Completed
	Write training curriculum	Tim Smith	Dec 31	Completed
	Identify potential volunteer leaders	Sue Thompson	Jan 30	Pending
	Schedule training	Denise Jones	Feb 15	Pending
	Facilitate training	Tim Smith	March 15	Pending
	Debrief from training	Tim, Sue and Denise	April 30	Pending

This is obviously an oversimplified example of a church goal but it provides a framework for identifying tactical steps and assigning accountability.

The church budgeting process is also incorporated into strategic planning as each goal needs to have identified resources (people, time, money) devoted to it to be successful.

The strategic planning process should deliver a document that details organizational goals for the short term (3-6 months) and long-term (1-3 years). This is a living document and should be updated as conditions and priorities change. The most important part is getting it written down and assigning responsibility – whether it be an employee or volunteer – assign the task.

The beauty of having a written plan, is that once all of the time and effort is invested in the plan, it is just a matter of overseeing the plan to completion. This is done through a structured performance management process and should be monitored and reviewed at least annually. Once a strategic plan is written with organizational goals, it is time to develop departmental and employee goals.

Does your church have a strategic plan for success?

By Patricia at Smart Church Management, Lake St. Louis, MO
Smartchurchmanagement.com