

## Strategic Planning

# Goals & Objectives

By the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- Understand the differences between goals and objectives.
- Articulate the broad strategies the organization will use to realize its vision in goals.
- Understand the importance of writing SMART objectives and identify what objectives are SMART.
- Construct at least 5 SMART objectives that will meet the organization's objectives in the next 2 years.

## What is a goal?

A goal is a relatively broad statement of what you want your organization to achieve in the next 3-5 years. It should be more specific and easier to accomplish in 3-5 years than your overall vision, but not yet focusing on the details of how you'll achieve it, either. Your organization probably shouldn't have more than five goals; you may want even fewer than that, depending on your resources.<sup>1</sup>

*Example 1: The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits has five goals:*

1. Strengthen the economic sustainability of individual nonprofits and the nonprofit sector.
2. Deepen relationships among member organizations to increase knowledge, effectiveness and capacity for collective action.
3. Build bridges between nonprofits and key institutions (business, local government, philanthropy, etc.) to increase partnership and cooperation.
4. Increase opportunities for cost saving programs, shared services and shared spaces.
5. Strengthen nonprofit community engagement.<sup>2</sup>

*Example 2: The American Farmland Trust also has five goals:*

1. Increase permanent protection of the most valuable and most threatened farmland in the US, and decrease conversion of farmland to other uses.
2. Improve soil health and reduce nutrient runoff on farms.
3. Transition agriculture into a source of environmental solutions and innovation.
4. Ensure land remains in farming as it transitions to the next generation and improve access to land for new farmers.
5. Expand economic opportunities and access to markets for farmers and ranchers—especially those threatened by development pressure.<sup>3</sup>

**Exercise: Brainstorm three goals for your organization. Where do you want to be in three years?**

---

---

---

---

## What is an objective?

An objective speaks to how your organization will work toward its goals in the next year or two. It should be an action statement and start with a verb, because it will break your goal down into actual activities that your organization will take on.

## What is a SMART objective?

Your objectives should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. If you start out with SMART objectives, it will be much easier to check in as the next couple years go by and see if your organization is achieving them (and, if not, what it needs to do to get there).<sup>4</sup>

*Example: One of the objectives of the American Farmland Trust is to, by 2020, "[c]omplete demonstration projects that reduce nutrients and increase soil health in target watershed demonstrations (Bay Delta, Puget Sound, Upper Mississippi, Ohio River Basin, Chesapeake Bay, Long Island Sound, and western New York)."*

This objective is **specific**: it lays out what the demonstration projects will do and where they will be.

It's also **measurable**: in 2020, they will be able to look back and measure whether they actually completed the demonstration projects, and if those projects were successful.

It's **attainable**: presumably, the American Farmland Trust decided that they had enough resources to carry out these demonstration projects

It's **relevant**: in fact, those demonstration projects go directly toward one of the American Farmland Trust's goals, to "reduce nutrient runoff on farms."

Finally, it's **time-bound**: the objective will be achieved by 2020.

**Exercise: Brainstorm five objectives for your organization. What do you want to achieve in the next two years?**

**Circle the words in your objectives that make them SMART.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Virtual Strategist's "Choosing Your Strategic Objectives" at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=inBaHOPZREQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inBaHOPZREQ)

<sup>2</sup> Full strategic plan available at [www.minnesotanonprofits.org/about-mcn/strategicplan\\_2010-14.pdf](https://www.minnesotanonprofits.org/about-mcn/strategicplan_2010-14.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Full strategic plan available at [www.farmland.org/mission-history](https://www.farmland.org/mission-history)

NOTE: Both these strategic plans refer to their objectives as "goals." Different funders and audiences may have different meanings for "goals" and "objectives"; we can adjust to that if necessary. For now, what's important is that we have both goals and objectives, no matter what we end up calling them.

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see Virtual Strategist's "How to Set SMART Goals" at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uThBb3kGf4k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uThBb3kGf4k) and Jen Lachman's "Strategic Planning Step 4 – Choose Priorities and Set Goals" at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFbyXNEINRM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFbyXNEINRM)