

CHAPTER 5: LONG RANGE PLANNING: WHY, HOW, AND WHEN

Too often young lawyer organizations forget the importance of long range planning and instead focus simply on operating one year at a time. Although short term planning and day-to-day operations are crucial for the operation of a young lawyer organization, long range planning is a necessity in order to avoid stagnation and to ensure the organization continues to meet the changing needs of its members and the community.

Once completed, a long-range plan provides the organization with a philosophical framework and ensures continuity from one administration to the next. Long range planning will aid the organization in avoiding reinventing the wheel and frequently altering the organization's focus and projects, which may prevent the organization from accomplishing anything of lasting value. Moreover, long range planning can help insulate the organization from a bad administration, which may be deadly or damaging for the organization.

The first step in developing a long-range plan is to form a long range planning committee. In larger organizations, this committee should be made up of individuals serving staggered terms of two or three years. This way, the committee has a sufficient historical understanding of the committee's past efforts while allowing the inflow of new ideas. No matter what the size of the organization, the committee should be formed with an emphasis on diversity. For example, the committee should have a mixture of new and existing members of the organization, officers and non-officers, civil and criminal lawyers, governmental, small firm and large firm attorneys.

The second step is for the committee to identify areas of challenge and opportunity for the organization. After prioritizing the areas, the committee should brainstorm and gather as many ideas as possible for each of the areas of challenge and opportunity. During this step, it is important to remember that there are no bad ideas or suggestions.

The third step is to develop goals. Depending on the size of the committee, it may be wise to form subcommittees (or focus groups) to address specific areas. In developing your organization's goals, remember the acronym--SMART. The goals must be Specific, Measurable, Assign Responsibility, be Realistic, and have a Timetable. In other words, you must know what you are going to do, you must be able to know when it has been done, you must know who will do it, you must know that it can be done, and you must have a plan for when it will be done. After defining your goals, you should put your long-range plan in written form.

Developing the long-range plan is not the end of the process. Rather, it is the beginning. A plan on paper will not benefit the organization if it is not implemented or if it is not periodically reviewed and modified.

In developing your long-range plan, it is often beneficial to use a non-member to facilitate the long-range plan. The facilitator should be experienced in leading planning sessions and should not have preconceived biases or beliefs about the organization, which a member will likely have. The Affiliate Assistance Team is available to fulfill the role of facilitator, to simply

assist in planning for the session, or to answer questions regarding the development and implementation of a long-range plan. Best of all, the AAT provides its services for free.