

## CHAPTER 1

# STRATEGIC PLANNING

Or how to stop reacting to every idea and  
advances the mission proactively

### OVERVIEW

Strategic thinking is essential in diversity work. The reality is that the demands on the diversity professional are such that the majority of the time can be spent simply responding and reacting to daily requests, regular reports, episodic opportunities, and unexpected concerns. The diversity professional who is not strategic runs the risk of reacting to what is presented, without creating proactive opportunities to manage the responsibilities of the position. An important skill is the ability to assess when and how to be strategic with key entities within the organization. This skill is crucial because it will empower the diversity professional to identify objectives and goals and ways to accomplish them in a specific time frame. The nature of the work and the position is such that it is easy to get lost and not understand the paths to success, or more basically, the definitions of success.

### WHAT IS STRATEGIC AND WHAT IS TACTICAL?

A fundamental understanding of strategic thought and development means appreciating the difference between strategy and tactics. *Strategy* is the overall aim or goal of the efforts. *Tactics* are the smaller, less long-term, but significant steps needed to implement the strategy. Without strategic vision, important tactics can appear to be strategic, but will prove to be short-term. Consider the following example of strategy versus tactics.

**Strategy versus Tactics**

GOAL: Win the war

STRATEGY: Capture the town

TACTICS:

- Approach by sea. This entire effort can be divided into several important roles: assessment of country X's naval capability—what kinds of boats will be used, what kind of troops, timing, when and where, what support will be needed, who will lead, how equipment and weapons will be unloaded, etc.
- Capture the beach: Which place and why, who will lead, what kind of troops, what are the tactics for preparing to advance on the mountain, etc.
- Advance on the mountain and capture the fort: Who is the best to lead, what equipment is needed, what troops, when and how, etc.

The military example provides an easy visual to illustrate this distinction. The goal is to win the war with country X. An important strategy is to capture town Y, by the sea. The plans to land and capture the beach, the fort on the mountain by the beach, and the surrounding town are all tactical. As important and intricate as the plans to implement the goal of taking the town are, these plans are tactical. Therefore, if the plan is only to capture the beach, because it is in an important area, then there is no strategy as to why the beach is relevant to an overall strategy to win the war. Putting this analogy in the diversity context, many programs, events, and activities are tactical efforts. They should be part of larger, longer-term goals that have a greater influence toward effectuating real and tangible results in diversity.

**The Diversity Planner**

GOAL: Increase representation in ethnic demographics.

STRATEGY: Increase the number of ethnically diverse applicants from schools where students have been successful at your organization as well as five other key schools.

TACTICS:

- Create relationships with the law school's admissions, career, and student services offices.
- Make contact with the student organizations of those ethnicities in those schools; provide programming to those schools that will showcase the company or firm to students but also allow the firm to become aware of specific students in the pipeline.
- Create connections with the students early and often.

If there is a proposal to invest in schools that are not in those groups or that have never had a good representation in the law firm and company, then it is important to evaluate the decision within the context of the strategy. Understanding this difference is important when identifying what is strategic and what is tactical. Identifying a strategic goal allows the diversity professional to develop a route or journey to accomplish the goal, with the necessary timetable to identify exactly where one is on their journey.

Sometimes, it is difficult to be strategic. However, the diversity professional can be strategic on different levels, all of which are important. Whether creating a strategic plan for the organization, developing a strategy for the department or committee, or devising your personal strategic goals, there are some steps to employ. We will review some strategic approaches and methods to implement them.

### Strategic Approach versus Strategic Plan

- A strategic approach means employing strategy to manage a situation.
- A strategic approach does not require the engagement of others and can be a work style or method used by the diversity professional.
- A strategic approach uses strategic thought to manage a situation within the control and confines of the professional.

EXAMPLE: The strategic plan is to increase demographics among ethnicities with a focus on specific schools where the yield and results have been positive.

A strategic approach is to understand the best and most successful ways to work with the schools. If one of your lawyers is influential in the school, use her “good offices” to approach the highest level of decision makers. If your company or firm is engaged in activity that may be beneficial to any of the schools (a community program, etc.), use that as a bridge to develop relationships. The strategic approach means being mindful of the impact analysis of each decision and how it will get you closer to your strategic goals. It is a careful and deliberate process that reflects thoughtful engagement, as if one were playing chess. The goal is to win the game; the strategic approach is to make the queen vulnerable. The queen is the increase in ethnic representation; working with the schools is a move by a knight, bishop, or rook. The game is to increase diversity representation.

### STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE ORGANIZATION

If the organization is committed to developing a strategic plan for diversity, that is the good news. Be careful what is wished for! Developing a strategic plan requires a strong investment of time, diligence, diplomacy, and compromise. To develop a strategic plan, one must appreciate the mechanics, the process, the diplomacy, and the diligence required, all while understanding the realities of the landscape of the organization. This appreciation and understanding must be filtered through tempered expectations that do not diminish optimism.

The development of a strategic plan is formulaic and applicable to most organizations and situations. It is the implementation of the formula that creates the unique tailor-made plan, like a recipe using ingredients that are indigenous only to the organization. The formula includes the identification of needs and goals, prioritizing them, assessing the challenges and opportunities, understanding the strengths and weaknesses, identifying realistic and pragmatic approaches and plans, and establishing a timetable.

When initiating a diversity strategic plan for the organization, it is important to establish, at the onset, that the fundamental goals of the diversity strategic plan are contained within any larger organizational strategic plan or annual strategies. *The diversity strategic plan cannot be a stand-alone goal that is not incorporated into or aligned with the overall strategy of the organization.* The goal for the strategic plan is a vision for the organization that defines the mission and specific goals and priorities of the diversity efforts and initiatives for the organization. This plan will also articulate how diversity goals are valued, prioritized, and incorporated into the organization.

### Mechanics

- Create a strategic planning committee
- Engage key leaders
- Solicit input on needs, goals, and priorities
- Obtain good data and assessments
- Understand strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities
- Establish priorities
- Create a timeline with milestones

There is always strategy in strategy. Be strategic about selecting the members of your planning committee. Make sure there are heavy lifters on the committee, with a good balance of creative thinkers and results-oriented participants. Ensure that the usual suspects are included, but also include those who may represent differing opinions. Most important, this group should command respect on the issue of diversity as well as display

leadership in the organization. They should have the capacity to make decisions and the internal relationships to get things done.

It is important to solicit effective ways to communicate and receive information. There are always differing styles of communication with differing groups, and considering these styles will yield better and more extensive information. Also, obtain as much quantitative data as necessary, for example, historical representation, attrition, retention, leadership demographics, committee representation, and any other quantifiable data that asks and answers questions that consistently arise. Find a way to present the information as concisely as possible. Decide the scope of the project and what is realistic. Establish a timetable with checkpoints for evaluation and review.

### Process

- Have key leaders on the planning committee
- Make it easy for leaders to be engaged
- Identify key stakeholders and the best way to communicate with them
- Explore many methods of communications and input
- Exhibit transparency in the process and decisions
- Understand the challenges to consensus, majority decisions, and minority positions

It is critical that key organization leaders are involved in the process from the beginning and throughout the major milestones in development. The identification of needs, wishes, objectives, and goals requires opportunities to hear from as many stakeholders as possible. Engaging in assessments of needs and goals requires processes that allow all constituents to be heard. Being heard will become an important element when establishing priorities, as there are always many more needs and goals than can be managed by a strategic plan. It is also important to identify all stakeholders and the best method of communicating with each of those constituents. Allow enough time to acquire quality and quantifiable information. Depending

on the scope of the plan, this could take months. Provide forums for input and provide as much transparency as possible on the identification of needs, goals, priorities, and methods. Solicit the organization's leaders' involvement in supportive and meaningful ways. Be sure that the strategic plan process and engagement is known to all those in the organization through formal and informal communication methods.

When sufficient information has been captured, it is important to devise ways to digest and present the information to the leadership of the strategic planning body. Establishing priorities and making decisions can require tremendous diplomacy as *the ultimate goal is to have a strategic plan that can be supported by all, with enthusiasm from the key diversity and organization leaders*. Whether operating by consensus, majority, or small-group decision makers, it is important to understand the impediments to decision making and the minority view. These understandings will factor into decisions regarding priorities and timetables. Be sure to filter all decisions through a reality check that considers time, resources, and support.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE DEPARTMENT OR DIVERSITY COMMITTEE**

The diversity professional may function within a department, work directly with a diversity and inclusion committee, or both. These entities may or may not be firmly established and the relationships may or may not be clearly defined. Even so, a strategic plan can be developed for the department or the committee. The approach will be limited in scope and specific to the role and responsibility of the entity. Such a strategic plan requires an understanding of the entity or unit and its role, function, and status within the organization. The goal for this strategic plan is to provide definition and direction to the unit, defining success and timetables.

**Mechanics**

- Identify the primary role and responsibility of the unit
- Identify the potential roles and responsibilities of the unit
- Identify key strategic alliances
- Understand, assess, and review historical successes and challenges
- Assess the critical needs of the committee or department
- Communicate and quantify knowledge with data
- Assess the strengths
- Determine the resources
- Establish priorities
- Create a timeline with milestones and opportunities to assess and review

The mechanics of this strategic plan are usually limited to those who are directly involved or affected by the diversity department or committee. The assessment, including the “who are we and what do we do” phase, is an important beginning, as such questions alone can be the challenge and the solution to strategic planning for the unit. Once the challenges are explored thoroughly, then a review of the resources should include strategic alliances, as well as historical successes and goodwill. Gathering data, including honest feedback on the needs of the committee or department, will prove invaluable.

Enlisting objective or professional help in facilitating discussions and advancing the mechanics will facilitate more robust information and resolutions. It is important to communicate, collect data, assess, and review and determine needs, priorities, and timetables. Whether it is very basic and simplistic or more involved, for example with an outside consultant, this kind of exercise can prove invaluable in understanding the role of the diversity initiative within the organization.



**Process**

- Make it easy to be heard and to communicate
- Have transparency
- Be inclusive
- Be aware of challenges, opportunities, limitations, and successes
- Understand the challenges to decision making

Process is always important as it affects the quality of the results. The process is the methods used to implement a plan. In diversity work, it is crucial to always be inclusive in the process. Make note of the communications processes—how to include people, when to do so, and how groups are composed can become political considerations. The style of communication often dictates the perception and value of the project. It is important that the process for the diversity committee or department’s strategic planning include as many members as possible. All voices should be heard because all workers will contribute to the overall effort.

An honest assessment of challenges and limitations is necessary to develop future planning. The planning process must employ a critical eye toward status, hierarchy, gravitas, political support, and alignment of the committee/department. Candid discussions about the pragmatic reality of the opportunities and challenges can yield a road map to developing priorities, short- and long-term. The process should include an understanding of the priorities and differing values of the different constituents. Developing a strategic plan for the committee or department will afford opportunities to brainstorm and problem share with individuals and alliances that will serve long-term partnerships. This process could and should yield the plan, but also make some inroads to creating relationships that can be strategic and mutually beneficial.

### **Pragmatic Tips for the Strategic Plan for the Department or Committee**

- Determine the most urgent issues for the unit and what has been stated as the most important for both unit and firm
- Conduct a comparative analysis of the two
- Identify common elements and contradictory elements
- Identify five priorities
- Determine what it would take to accomplish them
- Rank the priorities by importance or rank them by pragmatic and realistic accomplishment
- Establish a timetable

### **PERSONAL STRATEGY PLAN**

Sometimes it may be difficult to develop a diversity strategic plan for the organization, committee, or department. This does not preclude one from strategic planning in the role as the diversity professional. The diversity professional can always be strategic about what can be accomplished and how these accomplishments can be positioned strategically with other work. The diversity professional can, and should, determine what he or she can accomplish and be strategic about managing those accomplishments. The development and execution of this plan is solely dependent upon the diversity professional. The personal strategy plan is one that you have for your own role and performance as a leader of diversity within the organization. This plan is not necessarily for public consumption or review.

**Mechanics**

- Look at the job description
- Look at the 12-month and 6-month accomplishments
- List the greatest successes and reasons for them
- List unfinished business
- List big dreams
- Establish a five-year vision and a one-year vision
- Identify challenges and rank them
- Identify limitations
- Identify resources and alliances
- Identify what you think is most important and realistic and why
- Identify your long-term goals for you in this role
- Identify quick wins
- Identify specific challenges and how they will be managed
- Map a step-by-step strategy:
  - What is needed
  - Who is needed
  - How long is required (create a timetable)

The more strategic you are, the more control you will have over time, goals, and results. The day-to-day interruptions that occur will be viewed in context more quickly and priorities will be apparent. Decisions will be easier because they will either support and execute the strategic plan, or not. If not, then it should be clear why you should or should not invest any more time and resources.

To be less reactive requires a realistic plan for what can be accomplished. Whether the steps given in the “Mechanics” box are implemented with a more formal structured style or through mental exercises with limited notes and reminders, the mechanics of establishing a journey for the year, with a vision for the next five years, enables the diversity professional to assess his or her own effectiveness. The plan can be modest or formal, but it should yield a journey according to a strategy that is understood

and valued. This becomes important when reacting to the day-to-day demands of the position. It helps you keep your footing in a job that never delivers a routine day.

### Process

- Understand that this process requires self-awareness and self-assessment
- Be honest
- Avoid excuses
- With each priority identified, ask and answer five progressive “whys” on the relevance of that priority
- Understand your value proposition—what you bring to the table that advances the efforts
- Remind yourself why you accepted the position
- Evaluate your frustrations—why and when
- Consider the following:
  - How will this process contribute to your professional development goals?
  - What are your personal professional goals?
  - What are your needs, wants, and dreams?
  - What are your strengths?
  - What are your weaknesses?
  - What is your strategy to reconcile all of the above?

This process has elements of personal reflection in the context of professional accomplishments. Your honest self-assessment will contribute greatly to your success in diversity work. This is difficult work. Be kind to yourself as you explore your challenges and limitations. Understand what is beyond your control and what you can control. Be realistic about long-term visions. Big dreams can be broken into small steps or a few goals. It is not the grandiose, sweeping ideas that are usually part of this kind of personal strategic plan. Your personal and professional diversity journey will allow big dreams down a road of single goals and realistic plans.

**What You Should Know**

- Identify a few short-term and long-term goals.
- When deciding if you should adopt a new project or program or evaluating an existing one, ask yourself “why” five times.
  - Let’s have an affinity group. Why? The identified group wants one. Why? They believe it will be helpful to the organization. Why? It will build community? Why is that helpful? It will form connections, provide education, and help with retention. Why is that helpful? If people are better informed, have relationships within the organization, and folks know how they are doing, it may be easier to anticipate situations that may affect departures.
- Always assess if what you are doing is bringing the organization closer to short-term or long-term goals.
- Understand why one is investing in a program, initiative, or policy.
- Evaluate your investments frequently. *It will not always be a direct and perfect correlation with goals, but if it builds community, a strategic alliance, or good will, it may be worth the time.*