

Info Sheet No. 5 - 3

Developing a plan

The planning process

Most organisations have an annual planning process, timed to fit in with the submission of a funding proposal or funding agreement. There are various approaches that might be taken to the process of developing the broad organisational plan, and differing levels of involvement that various staff, and the board of management might have.

Ideally, the board of management should provide broad direction and make decisions about priorities. The most common way to do this is to hold a special planning session, either as part of a board of management meeting, or as a separate exercise, and usually with the involvement of key staff

A board of management planning session may cover the following:

- Information that will affect the plan for the coming planning period: review and evaluation of the previous period, existing contracts and obligations, existing resources, external requirements, and client feedback.
- Analysis of what may impact on the organisation during the coming period
- What the board of management wants the organisation to achieve in the coming period
- Parameters and priorities for activities and initiatives

Staff or a sub committee may then take responsibility for:

- Developing the details of actions and activities
- Developing indicators for evaluating the outcomes
- Conducting a resource analysis
- Documenting the final plan for board of management approval
- Linking the plan to individual staff work plans

Preparing to plan

Before a formal process of planning actually commences, the following need to be considered:

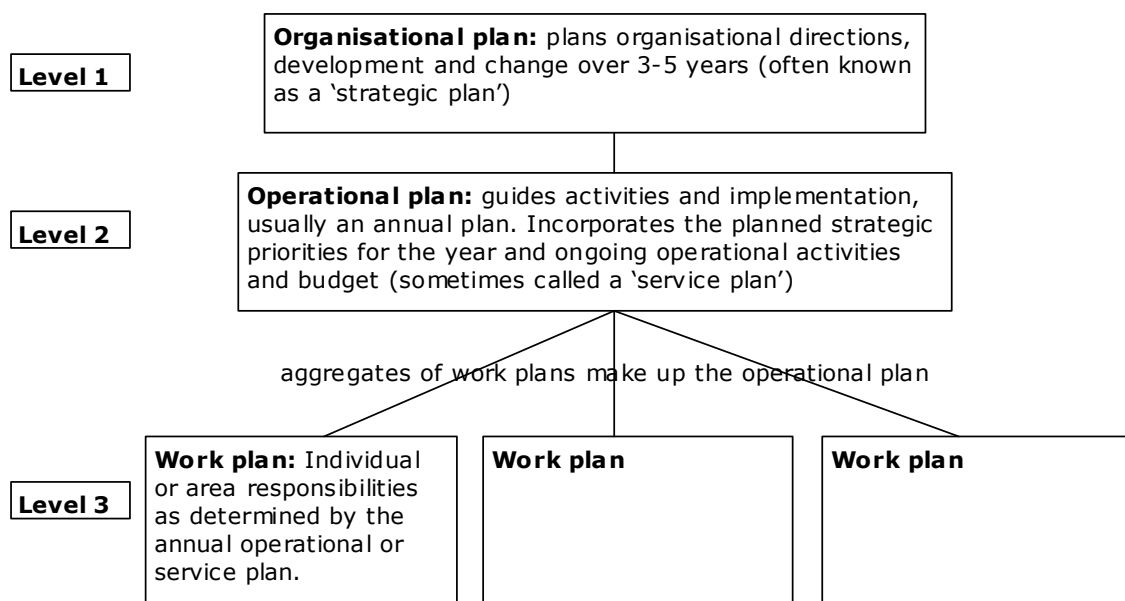
- What is the purpose and scope of the planning exercise

- What process will be used to develop the plan
- Who needs to participate, and the way in which they need to be involved
- The resources that will be needed to support the planning process (particularly time and skills)
- The way in which the plan will be used, and the format for the plan that will suit this purpose
- The information that is needed to inform the plan and how this will be collected and analysed
- The links that this planning process and plan may have with other planning processes that the organisation might be involved in
- The time frame for the process.

Planning levels

Planning can be done on a number of levels:

- **Longer term organisational ('strategic') planning:** This involves thinking about what is likely to happen in the future, and what changes the organisation may have to make. These types of plans are broad, and usually have a 3-5 year time frame.
- **The annual operational or service plan:** Operational or service planning involves thinking about the coming year, and planning the ongoing activities and how resources are going to be allocated (the budget).
- **Work plans or action plans:** these are specific 'day to day' plans that show tasks to be completed by individuals. These may change regularly from week to week as tasks are completed and new tasks taken up.



The planning framework

There are various approaches to planning and to formatting the planning document. The most common forms of plans are 'strategic plans' or 'business plans'. These are the broader level plans for organisations, which should be accompanied by more detailed action plans in the form of operational plans and/or work plans.

For more information about different types of plans, see **Info sheet: Glossary of planning terms**.

Whatever the focus or type of plan, the planning process for the organisation should provide a plan or series of linked plans that show:

- **WHY** the organisation is doing what it is doing (purpose)
- **WHAT** results or outcomes the organisation is trying to achieve
- **HOW** these results will be achieved
- **WHO** is going to do **WHAT** by **WHEN**
- **WHAT** resources will be needed and where these will come from
- **HOW** the organisation will assess its achievements
- **HOW** the plan will be monitored and adjusted when changes are needed

Developing a plan

A formal planning process, designed to produce a broad organisational plan, or annual operational plan, should include the following stages:

1. **Preparation:** Decisions need to be made about the scope and purpose of the plan, the type and level of input needed from various stakeholders, and the background information (including review and evaluation evidence), that will be needed to inform the process.
2. **Analysis:** There are several areas of an organisation's operations and environment that need to be considered, reviewed and analysed:
 - **Current operations:** review of the current activities and services, the governance, management and internal operations, the current obligations and contractual agreements, and the external relationships maintained by the organisation. These should be reviewed in terms of areas that are operating well, any issues or problem areas, and areas that are identified for change or improvement.
 - **Changes or trends impacting on the organisation:** considering changes in the population or client base and its needs, changes in requirements of organisations affecting governance, management or operations, and changes in the broader organisational environment. The organisation needs to

identify all significant trends and identify how it needs, or would like to respond.

- **New directions:** considering what the organisation is required to do, and identifying what new activities or areas of development are desirable.

3. **Direction setting:** From the results of the analysis, the organisation needs to identify what action it wants to take in terms of:

- Continuing activities
- Changes to existing activities
- New activities or developments

All proposed activity should have priorities assigned that indicate whether an activity is high, medium or low priority in terms of its implementation.

4. **Impact analysis:** The impact of implementing the proposed activities needs to be analysed, looking particularly at the following:

- The mandate, purpose or core business of the organisation: is the organisation shifting direction or expanding its mandate or purpose? Have relevant stakeholders (such as members or client group) been consulted?
- The existing long term plan: are the proposed directions within the parameters of an existing longer term plan, or are changes required to an existing longer term plan (this is particularly a consideration for decisions taken during an annual planning process when a longer term plan exists)
- Resources: what will the impact be on resources, are the planned activities feasible to implement, and is it necessary to seek additional resources or reduce some existing activities in order to accommodate new activities.
- Outcomes: what outcomes or 'key result areas' will the proposed plan produce? Will these benefit the constituents or clients of the organisation?
- Existing contracts and obligations: will the proposed plan affect any existing contracts or obligations? Will it require the organisation to enter into any new contracts or agreements?

5. **Operation:** Once the direction setting is finalised the plan needs to be 'operationalised'. This involves the development of:

- An operational plan indicating more specific action, time frames and responsibilities for implementation
- A budget
- A monitoring and evaluation plan

Documenting and formatting plans

Plans are meant to be used and referred to. A plan is more likely to be useful and used by people in the organisation if it is:

- Simple and easy to follow
- 'Real' – avoid documenting a plan with relatively meaningless aims or strategies
- Linked to identifiable activities, actions and resources

The following diagrams illustrate a simple format (based on a strategic planning format), that links a broader level organisational plan with the work plans of individuals: (*note: for small organisations, or for a simpler plan, 1. & 2. may be combined*)

1. Organisational plan

| What the organisation wants to achieve | How the organisation will do this ('strategies') | How the organisation will know that it has achieved this | Resource implications |
|--|--|--|--|
| <i>Example: Improvement in client satisfaction</i> | <i>Introduce client feedback monitoring</i> | <i>Proportion of clients giving positive feedback</i> | <i>Staff time to develop client feedback system and to analyse returns</i> |

2. Operational plan

| Strategies | Action | Who | Date for completion |
|---|---|--------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Introduce client feedback monitoring</i> | • <i>Develop client exit interview and feedback sheet</i> | • <i>Coordinator</i> | • <i>End June</i> |
| | • <i>Pilot on 4 clients and review</i> | • <i>Project officer</i> | • <i>End July</i> |
| | • <i>Implement exit interviews</i> | • <i>Coordinator</i> | • <i>August</i> |
| | • <i>First report on results</i> | • <i>Coordinator</i> | • <i>December</i> |

3. Work plan

(*example: Project officer*)

| Action | Tasks | Date for completion |
|--|---|---------------------|
| • <i>Pilot on 4 clients and review</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Select clients and seek consent</i> • <i>Conduct pilot</i> • <i>Feedback on changes to Coordinator</i> | • <i>End July</i> |