**COLORADO**
CHARTER SCHOOL INSTITUTE

Strategic Planning Overview

A primary responsibility of the board of directors of charter schools is to determine the strategic direction that the organization will take over the next three to five years. This requires the board to have a comprehensive understanding of the current status of the school academically, financially, operationally, and culturally.

Strategic planning involves creating a vision, with supporting goals that can be regularly measured and adjusted as needed. The strategic plan becomes the guide the board and school leader use to align leadership and improvement efforts. It allows the board to focus on effective governance processes and the school leader to direct their efforts on operational leadership practices. A well-developed strategic plan provides the structure for the board to monitor progress toward achieving goals and create a process for evaluating the school leader.
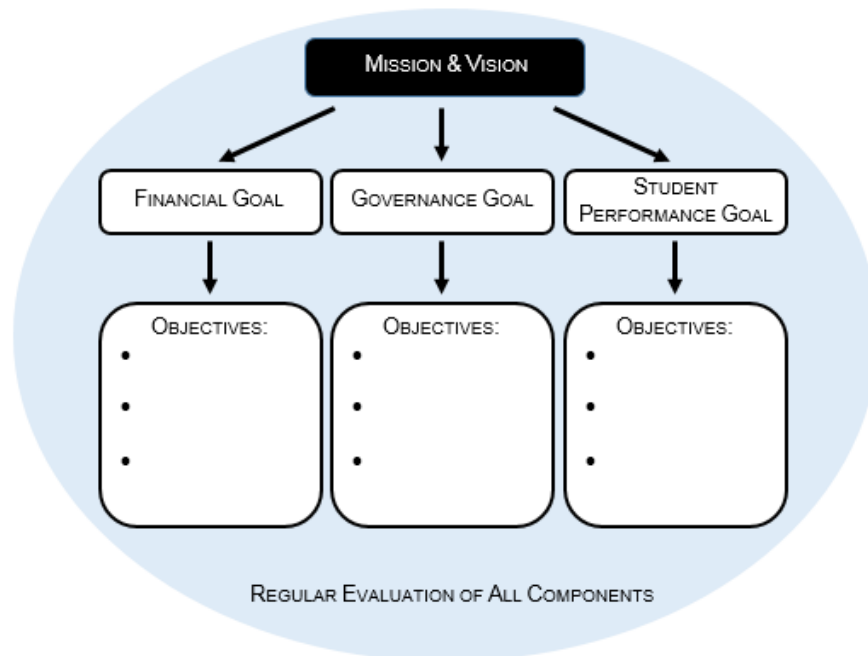
Knowing the magnitude of challenges that charter schools encounter, a well-developed and utilized strategic plan will assist the board and school leader to successfully navigate these issues as they arise.

Strategic Planning Outcomes

The charter school governing board plays a key role in defining strategic goals and developing the structure of the plan. It is recommended there be 3-5 major goal areas identified, including finance, student performance, and governance. The remaining two goals should focus on specific areas the board identifies as critical to the school fulfilling its mission. Some areas to consider are operations, school culture, communications, public relations/marketing, and fund raising.

It must be noted that the strategic planning process can become futile if boards fail to develop specific and measurable goals based on the perspectives of major constituencies (such as school leadership, staff, families, and students) and the realities and needs of the organization. When these factors are taken into account and a strategic plan is effectively used, boards can efficiently monitor their progress. *The main goal of strategic planning is to improve organizational effectiveness by utilizing a systemic approach to monitoring actions and results and making adjustments when necessary.*
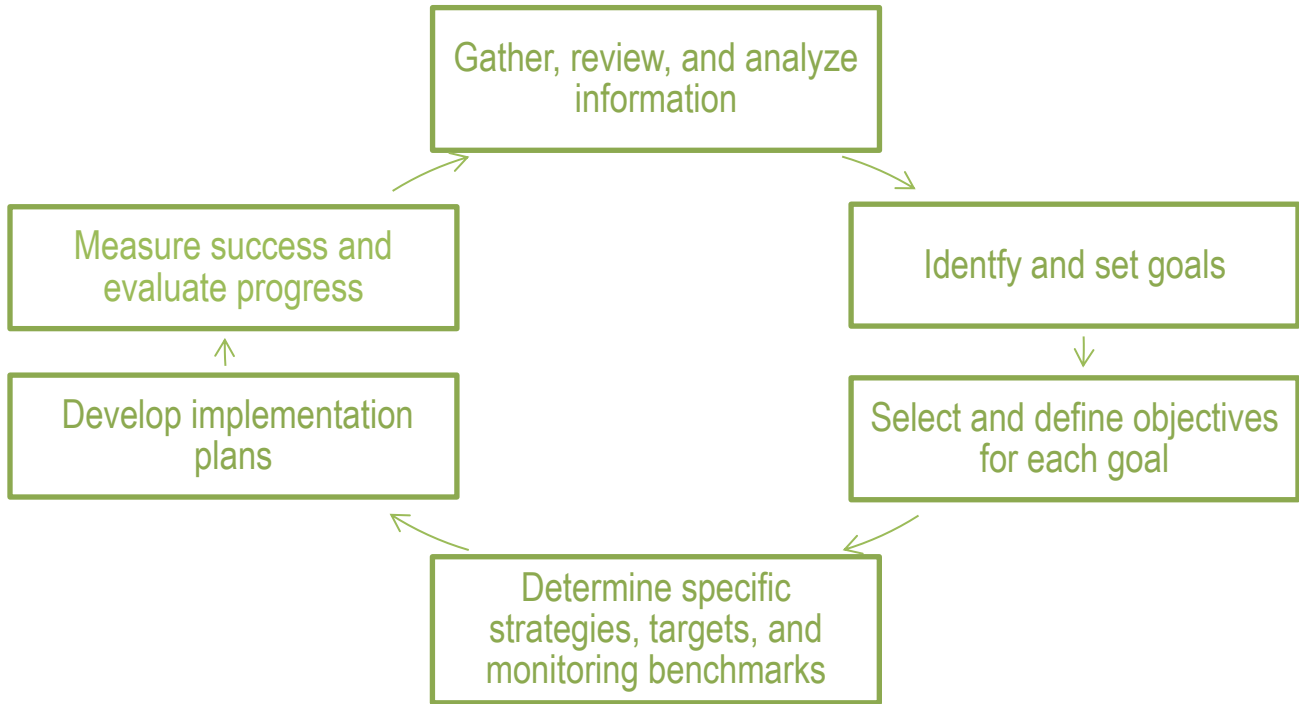

*the student performance goal should be directly linked to the school Unified Improvement Plan.

The strategic planning outcomes described in this guide align with the areas evaluated through the CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS) system.

Strategic Planning Process

It is important to note that strategic plans are intended to evolve over time. As the realities of governing/monitoring the plan emerge, the board will recognize that modifications and changes will have to be made. The plan is not carved in stone. It should be used to guide the board's work to ensure the viability of the school far into the future. By setting achievable and measurable goals, clearly articulating actions, identifying persons responsible and developing an annual reporting schedule, the board will be positioned to improve the overall effectiveness of the institution.

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│  Gather, review, and     │
│  analyze information      │
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┌─────────────────────┐                    ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Measure success and  │                    │  Identfy and set     │
│ evaluate progress    │                    │  goals               │
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┌─────────────────────┐                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Develop              │                    │ Select and define        │
│ implementation plans │                    │ objectives for each goal │
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              ┌─────────────────────────────┐
              │ Determine specific           │
              │ strategies, targets, and     │
              │ monitoring benchmarks        │
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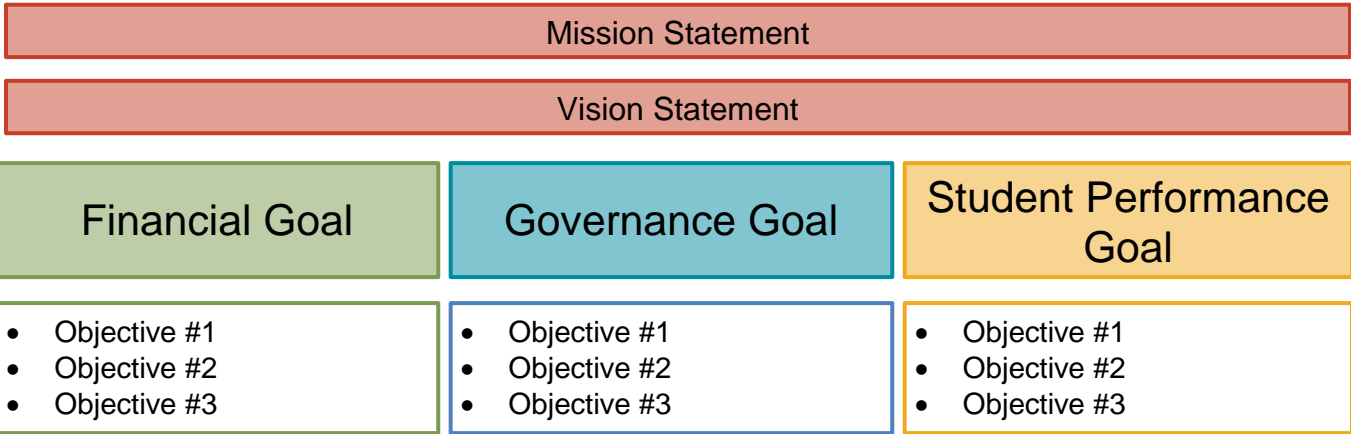
This guide and the accompanying worksheet can be used as a starting point for developing a strategic plan. The guide is not all-inclusive but should provide with charter school boards with a basic outline with which to begin the strategic planning process.

During the strategic planning process, keep the following tips in mind:

- **Keep it short and concise.** Strategic plans can be highly effective if they are focused and brief (no more than five pages).
- **Include a wide variety of perspectives.** Strategic planning should include the right people including members of the board, school administrators/teacher leaders, and parents.
- **Use an unbiased facilitator** or a small group of facilitators to run strategic planning meetings in order to ensure that the process stays on track.
- **Be prepared to revisit your plan each year** and adjust your strategies as needed.

Strategic Planning Road Map

The graphic organizer below mirrors the structure that is presented in this guide and the provided template. This represents one of many possible structures that can be used to develop a strategic. While it is not essential that this structure and/or template is utilized specifically, CSI has developed this template in order to provide a sample structure for governing boards that are looking for some support in the strategic planning process.

Mission Statement

Vision Statement

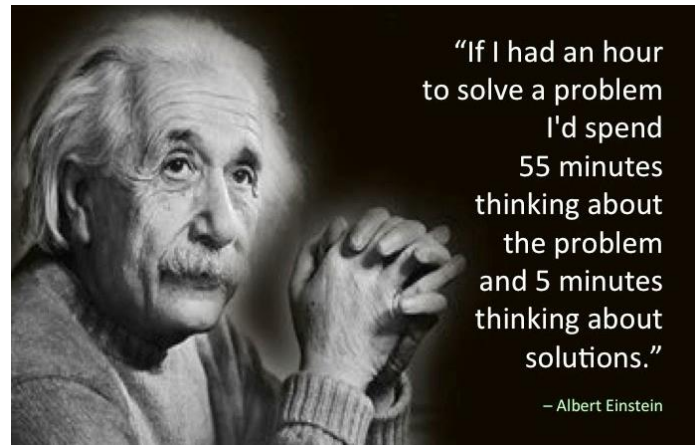| Financial Goal	Governance Goal	Student Performance Goal
• Objective #1 • Objective #2 • Objective #3	• Objective #1 • Objective #2 • Objective #3	• Objective #1 • Objective #2 • Objective #3

After the goals and objectives have been identified, develop the various strategies that will be implemented to accomplish the objectives. Each strategy should have clear and measureable monitoring benchmarks for each year for the duration of the strategic plan (3-5 years) to track progress. It is recommended that the specific activities (and corresponding resources needed) be updated annually in order to ensure that the strategic plan remains a living document and reflects the current reality of the school.

Goal A	*Enter specific goal language*
Objective 1	*Enter specific objective language*
Strategy A	*Enter specific strategy language*

Year 1 Monitoring Benchmarks	Year 2 Monitoring Benchmarks	Year 3 Monitoring Benchmarks
Enter specific monitoring benchmarks for Year 1	*Enter specific monitoring benchmarks for Year 2*	*Enter specific monitoring benchmarks for Year 3*

Year 1 Activities and People Responsible (to be updated annually)
Enter activities (including the resources and people) necessary to achieve the current year strategy.

1. Gather, Review, and Analyze Information

The first step in the strategic planning process requires the governing board to complete a thorough review of the school's existing data. This review should be broad and include both academic and non-academic data.

The following sections document various steps in the process and include a review of the school vision and mission, a school overview and review of the school's history and context, and a review of the school's data.

"If I had an hour to solve a problem I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions."
– Albert Einstein

This review should take place prior to the drafting of the strategic plan and should help ground the subsequent conversation. It is conceivable that this part of the conversation will take the greatest amount of time and it is critical that this step not be skipped.

Vision & Mission

- ✓ What is the school's vision?
    - ❖ The school's vision should articulate the ideal vision for the future. If the school fulfills its mission well, the vision will be the long-term outcome.
- ✓ What is the school's mission?
    - ❖ The mission should articulate the school's fundamental purpose. It should explain why the school exists and what it does to achieve its vision.

About Us

- ✓ Where have we been?
- ✓ Where are we now?
- ✓ Where should we go and why?
- ✓ Who are we, how do we work toward our vision, and what makes us unique?
- ✓ What are the guiding principles of our work and how we operate?

The Brief Description included in the school Unified Improvement Plan could be a great place to start as you work on gathering and documenting this information.

Our Data

- ✓ What do we know about our current level of **academic performance**?
  - □ Review current and previous CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS) Reports and CDE School Performance Framework (SPF) Reports, and the most recent Unified Improvement Plan (UIP).
  - □ Review interim assessment results and interim reports provided by CSI.
  - □ Review internal indicators of student success including student grades, attendance rates, pass rates, discipline rates, graduation rates, etc.
- ✓ What do we know about our current level of **financial performance**?
  - □ Review current and previous CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS) Reports
  - □ Review most recent annual school financial audit.
  - □ Review most recent quarterly financials.
- ✓ What do we know about our current level of **organizational performance**?
  - □ Review current and previous CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS) Reports.
  - □ Review most recent school leader evaluation.
  - □ Review staff, student, and family satisfaction surveys.
  - □ Review results from a Board Needs Assessment.

As data is gathered, it might be helpful to complete a situational analysis. A tool such as a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threat) analysis might be helpful in synthesizing and evaluating current performance.

Other data could be explored as available within the school. The table below includes various data that might be relevant as you work to complete the strategic plan.

Performance Data	Demographic Data	Process Data	Perception Data
• Local summative and interim assessment results • Student work samples • Classroom assessment results • K-3 reading assessment results (required by READ Act)	• School location and size of student body • Student characteristics, including poverty, language proficiency, IEP, race/ethnicity • Student mobility /re-enrollment rates • Staff characteristics (experience, attendance, turnover)	• External school reviews • Observations of instruction • Academic interventions available to students • Student attendance • Discipline referrals and suspension rates • Schedules and class size • Family and community involvement • Services and/or programs • MTSS fidelity of implementation	• Teaching and learning conditions (e.g. staff surveys) • Perception survey data (parent/student surveys) • Self-assessment results • Focus group data from key constituents

Much of the work done for this part of the strategic plan will not be captured directly in the final strategic plan. However, this information can be distilled down to the most essential elements and included in the strategic plan in the introductory section. The template that is provided includes space for an overview of the school, some school history, and the current reality, challenges, and opportunities.

2. Identify and Set Goals

The second step in the strategic planning process is to synthesize the information gathered about the current state of the school and organization and begin to chart the next steps towards achieving the mission and vision.

The goals should be the highest level statement of aim or purpose that is included in the strategic plan. This plan's goals should articulate clear statements of what the school wants to achieve to advance its mission and address relevant problems, needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Change can be defined as the gap between the "real" and the "ideal" and the first step in the strategic planning process provides the board with the opportunity to investigate the current state of the organization (i.e. the way things are right now). The second step in the process provides the board with the opportunity to envision the next phase of the organization (i.e. the way you would like to be in the future).

Goals

- ✓ What are some obstacles that could prevent us from realizing our vision?
- ✓ What are our long-term goals i.e. what we will do to realize our vision?
- ✓ What are our short-term goals i.e. what will be done in year 1, year 2, year 3, etc.?

Remember, a good strategic plan includes three to five goals and should include at least a student performance goal, a financial goal, and a governance goal.

Student Performance Goal

The student performance goal should be directly related to the school Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) and should be largely at the direction of the school leader. The board should play an active role in evaluating progress towards the student performance goal and the other goals articulated in the UIP. A well-developed strategic plan (and UIP) provides the structure for the board to monitor progress toward achieving goals and create a process for evaluating the school leader.

Financial Goal

The financial goal should be related to the school's current financial viability and sustainability. This goal may be directly related to the school's performance against the CSI Financial Framework if the school does not meet or needs to improve its position against the various financial metrics included in the framework. However, the goal may also address enrollment challenges/changes, facility purchase or renovations, etc.

Governance Goal

The governance goal should be related to the board's ongoing efforts to improve its practices and implement sound governance and oversight. This goal might incorporate noted areas for improvement related to the school's performance against the CSI Organizational Framework. However, the goal may also address areas for growth identified through a Board Needs Assessment.

Other Goals

The remaining two goals should focus on specific areas the board identifies as critical to the school fulfilling its mission. Some areas to consider are operations, school culture, communications, public relations/marketing, and fund raising.

3. Select and Define Objectives

The third step in the strategic planning process involves identifying and describing the objectives for each goal. While the goals will articulate clear statements of what the school wants to achieve, the objectives will break that goal down into more measurable and actionable steps to will help move the organization towards the identified goal.

The objectives are the primary unit for strategic analysis and decision-making. Objectives reflect the outcome or management impact the school is trying to achieve and collectively represent the breadth of all school activity. Most objectives will be measurable and will include quantifiable targets.

Objectives

- ✓ What specific objectives will the school target in order to make progress towards its student performance goal?
- ✓ What specific objectives will the school target in order to make progress towards its financial goal?
- ✓ What specific objectives will the school target in order to make progress towards its organizational goal?
- ✓ How will you prioritize objectives within each goal area? Identify a priority objective for each goal that reflects the top near-term performance improvement strategy.
- ✓ What programs or initiatives are already being implemented or could be implemented to support each objective?

The figure below provides an example of how the strategic plan goals and objectives may interact.

Financial Goal

Priority ★
- Objective #1
- Objective #2
- Objective #3

The objectives will be captured in the strategic plan template provided. They will be captured in the overview that outlines the goals and the corresponding objectives and they will also be captured in the supporting pages for each objective.

4. Strategies, Targets, and Monitoring Benchmarks

The fourth step in the strategic planning process is to develop the specific strategies that will be implemented in order to accomplish the objectives and thus the overarching goal.

Each goal might have several objectives and each objective might have several strategies. The strategies taken together, if accomplished, should allow the organization to meet the identified objective.

Each strategy should include monitoring benchmarks which specify what will be accomplished each year throughout the duration of the strategic plan. The final monitoring benchmark should culminate in the achievement of the identified strategy and support the organization in meeting the objective and goal. The monitoring benchmarks can also be thought of as key indicators or performance measures that track progress toward achieving a objective.

Strategies

- ✓ What systemic changes or updates are required to realize the vision and meet the objectives?
- ✓ What benchmarks will be used as indicators of success and allow the school to track progress toward achieving each objective?
- ✓ How will you know that implementation is on track to achieve the desired outcomes?

5. Implementation Plan

The fifth step in the strategic planning process is to develop the specific activities and corresponding resources necessary to achieve the current year strategy. This component of the strategic plan will be the most detailed and will require significant input from the staff that will be charged with carrying out the strategic plan.
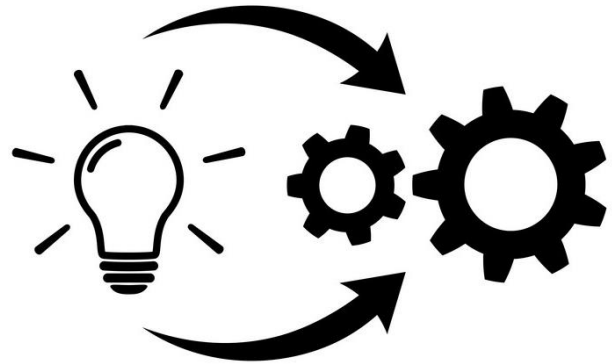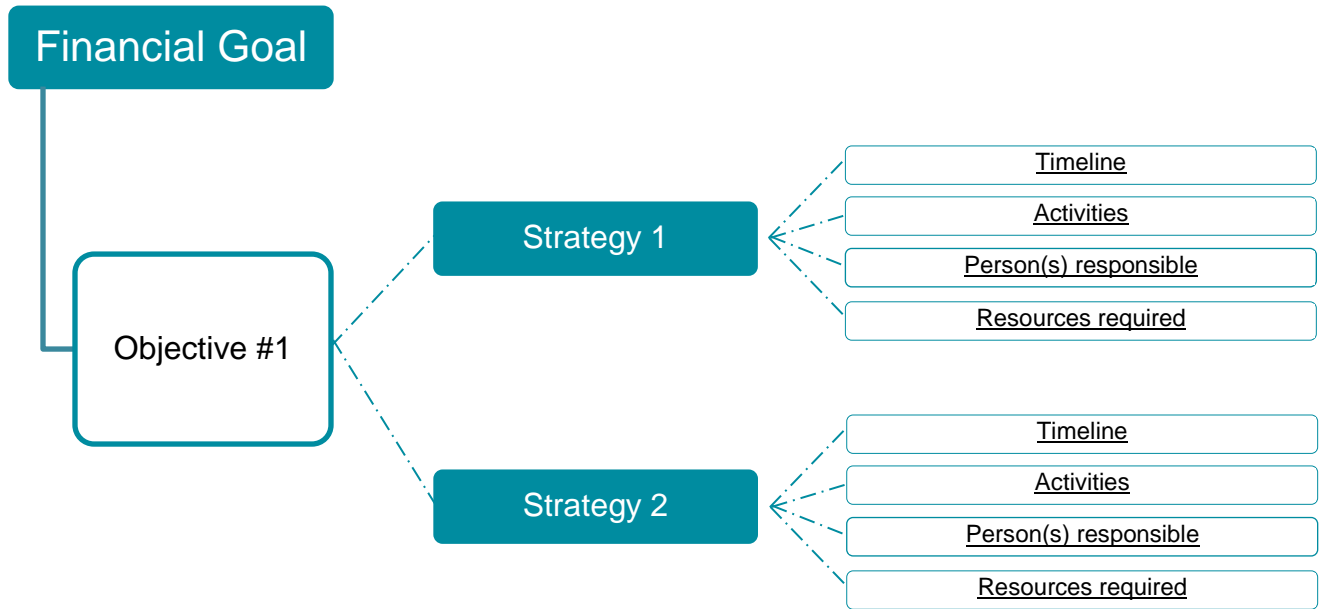
It is recommended that the implementation plan be developed/updated annually in order to ensure that the specific activities continue to remain aligned with the current state of the organization and can be adjusted based on the progress towards the overarching objectives and goals. An annual update to the implementation plan also helps to reinforce the idea that the strategic plan is a living document and this annual review can become a part of the board annual calendar.

The activities within the implementation plan should be specific and show a progression that moves towards the overarching strategy or monitoring benchmark.

Activities & Resources

- ✓ What is the timeline, resources, and people necessary to meet the strategy identified? How will you implement those changes or updates within a given time period?
- ✓ How will the plan be announced and disseminated to school leadership, staff, parents, and the community?

The figure below provides an example of how the strategic plan goals, objectives, strategies, and activities & resources may interact.

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│  Financial Goal     │
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           │
           │        ┌─────────────────┐         ┌──────────────────────────────┐
           │        │   Strategy 1    │◄─────── │          Timeline            │
           │        └─────────────────┘         ├──────────────────────────────┤
  ┌────────┴────────┐                           │          Activities          │
  │                 │                           ├──────────────────────────────┤
  │  Objective #1   │                           │     Person(s) responsible    │
  │                 │                           ├──────────────────────────────┤
  └─────────────────┘                           │      Resources required      │
                    │                           └──────────────────────────────┘
                    │
                    │   ┌─────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    └── │   Strategy 2    │◄──── │          Timeline            │
                        └─────────────────┘      ├──────────────────────────────┤
                                                 │          Activities          │
                                                 ├──────────────────────────────┤
                                                 │     Person(s) responsible    │
                                                 ├──────────────────────────────┤
                                                 │      Resources required      │
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The implementation plan will be captured in the strategic plan template provided. The activities and corresponding resources will be captured in the supporting pages for each objective. There is space in the template for an implementation plan for the current year. Each subsequent year will require the board to update the implementation plan according to the current state of the organization and progress towards the monitoring benchmark and goals.

6. Measure Success and Evaluate Progress

The last step in the strategic planning process is to determine how progress will be assessed and how impact of the strategic plan will be measured. Essentially, you are seeking to answer the question, "Is what we are doing making a difference"?

This work will include the development of the process for evaluating progress and measuring success against the strategic plan goals, objectives, and strategies. This process should include a discussion of what was done, what was learned, what that does this mean, and where do we go from here.

This is an often overlooked part of the strategic process but it is critical and the results of this monitoring can help you to improve the efficacy of your work.

- ✓ How will the school know the adult actions in the plan are having an impact? How can the school progress monitor the impact of the implementation plan? What changes in quality will be observed due to each action?
- ✓ Which areas showed the most success or improvement? What program components do you think contributed to these outcomes the strongest?
- ✓ Which areas did not demonstrate success? Were these outcomes below the level expected or below an acceptable level? Why do you think outcomes were not more positive? How could you strengthen programming to promote more positive outcomes?
- ✓ What is the process for making changes to the implementation plan, if needed?
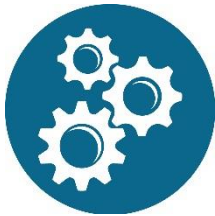
The program evaluation plan may not be captured in the strategic plan and is not included in the template but there should be a plan to periodically review progress towards the goals prior to the annual update of the implementation plan. This might include a plan to include a quarterly update on progress during the regularly scheduled board or committee meeting.