



STRATEGIC PLANNING IN SMALL COMMUNITIES A MANAGER'S MANUAL

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Foreword

Like everything else in the time of the pandemic, strategic planning has become more difficult. Between the intensely partisan and divisive politics of 2020 and the complete uncertainty of budget numbers, thinking about mission statements or visionary goals seems superfluous to many elected officials and nonsensical to others. Elected officials find themselves inundated at public hearings by residents demanding answers to national COVID policies, when the virus will be stopped, or when they can go back to their regular life. Residents want to debate the merits of critical race theory and how to address an individual's preferred pronouns in school. Meanwhile, making sure basic services or needs are met or that employees have what is needed to do their work becomes secondary to the headline of the day or the budget crisis du jour.

Who has the time or energy to think about what the community would look like if it were perfect when there is so much energy focused on what is wrong, wrong, wrong in this very moment? Yet, somehow, good government must move past what is wrong and refocus energy on what is right—and what is possible. Our communities are places of unity, cohesion, and pride. In our lifetime, there has never been a harder time to find consensus on a future vision and remain focused on local priorities. Strategic planning, linked to the locality's budget process, allows facts to be known and shared, goals to be established, and priorities to be set. Through this process, small communities can remember what makes them unique, focus their efforts on what unites them, and move toward a better future, and do so in a way that pulls the community closer, rather than drives it apart.

In 2021, in the midst of so much antagonism and angst, ICMA funded this fellowship to help managers remember what they already know—our time and energy, as well as our budgets, should reflect what matters to our

community and what makes the community a better place. Dr. Stephanie Davis, with local government budgeting experience in localities small and large, serving as a professor in the School of Public and International Affairs at Virginia Tech, was the ideal person to bring us all back around to what matters. Strategic planning — that involves the community, incorporates the unique vision and goals of the community, is agreed to by the elected body, and tied firmly to our budgets — will keep residents, staff, and elected representatives focused on the business, as well as the vision, of government and how to make the community a better place. Davis uses data from communities around the country to show the current status of strategic planning in small communities and best practices to refocus the process. She knows of what she speaks. She has facilitated these retreats and held the hands of many managers as they navigate this tumultuous time and sacred duty.

Strategic planning and a better budget process won't solve all your community's problems. But it will help your community remember that while the national debates and discussions over issues of incredible importance matter deeply to us, good governance must go on. Revenues must be predicted, budgets balanced, bills paid, and services rendered. And, if we want to be more than we are already, we must do these things with a future in mind. Otherwise, our community is stagnant. So, in this time of chaos and noise, the way forward is simple and elegant. Processes already exist to assist local governments in refocusing their energies on their mission, vision, and values. This study will help each of us to remember what we know and to find additional tools to do our budgeting and strategic planning better.



Sara McGuffin
Town Manager
Amherst, Virginia

Introduction

“If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.”

Yogi Berra, former New York Yankees catcher

For many local government managers, the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the priorities of the local government to mitigation and response to the public health crisis. The ability to set aside time with elected officials, staff, and other key stakeholders to develop a plan for action is severely limited. Quite frankly, strategic planning is just not a priority.

But at some point, strategic planning should be considered a priority. In my experience with small communities in a challenging area of the country, the ability to prioritize resources is essential *because of the lack of resources*. Strategic planning is a necessity to align human and financial resources with the priorities of the community.

A strategic plan is a tool for you, your elected officials, and your residents for the effective and efficient delivery of services in your community. The strategic plan provides you and your elected officials with the answer to the question “Why are we doing this?” The strategic plan is the elected official’s vision for the community and provides the guide for budgeting new resources or reallocating existing ones. Whether created through formal or informal processes, complicated or simple, a strategic plan is unique and tailored to fit your community’s needs.

This report is intended for first-time administrators and/or those working in communities without a strategic plan, specifically for those in small communities with populations 20,000 and below. It provides an overview of the benefits of having a strategic plan from managers who have them, use them, and encourage them. Most importantly, this report provides managers with guidelines on “how to” and items to consider before starting the process. The case studies at the end of the report provide detailed information directly from small community managers on how they built the case for, created, and implemented their own strategic plan.

Report Organization

This report is composed of five sections. **Why Do Strategic Planning** provides an overview of the benefits, including utilizing the plan as an accountability tool, a prioritization tool, and a communication tool. **Strategic Planning in Action** provides the reader with process guidance, examples, and key questions to consider when moving forward with a strategic plan process. **We Have a Strategic Plan, Now What?** details steps of adoption, updates, reporting

on progress, and linking to the budget. **Conducting Performance Management** introduces performance management and how it overlaps with strategic planning. The final section provides five **Case Studies** and an in-depth review of the processes and procedures used by the communities to develop their strategic plan.

Overview of the Research Report and Process

This research report was developed in phases over a period of six months. In July 2021, the academic and professional literature was reviewed. Virtual interviews were conducted with 13 local government officials in Virginia. The purpose of the interviews and the research review was to collect data to inform the development of a survey to be distributed to local governments. The communities who participated in the initial interviews are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Interview Participants

Virginia Local Government	Population	Local Government Official
Pearisburg	2,909	Town Manager
Bedford	6,657	Town Manager
Ashland	7,565	Town Manager
Scottsville	524	Town Manager
Amherst	2,732	Town Manager
Crew	2,465	Town Manager
Bland County	6,270	County Administrator
Alleghany County	15,223	County Administrator
Patrick County	17,608	County Administrator
Norton	3,687	City Manager
Emporia	5,766	City Manager
Falls Church	14,128	Deputy City Manager
Poquoson	12,460	City Manager
Bristol	17,219	City Manager

A strategic planning survey, distributed in August 2021, provided a snapshot of strategic planning initiatives in small communities throughout the United States and is referenced throughout this report. The survey was piloted with International City/County Management Association (ICMA) staff and 14 local government managers in Virginia to review the flow and structure of the survey.¹

The final survey was then distributed in August 2021 by the Virginia Municipal League (VML), Virginia Association of Counties (VACO), Virginia Local Government

Management Association (VLGMA) and ICMA. Data analysis was conducted during the month of September 2021.

The survey was completed by 95 local government officials in 24 states, the District of Columbia, and one international respondent. Tables 2A, 2b, and 2C below detail the types of local government, the population of the representative governments, and the local government official completing the survey.

The respondents included local government managers, assistants or deputy managers, department heads, elected officials, and others, including clerks, interim managers, and retired managers. The respondents represented a balance of city/town and county governments and 70% were from communities with populations less than 10,000.

Local government officials were asked if they had a strategic plan, were in the process of developing one, or had some components of a strategic plan. About half of the officials responding noted they have a strategic plan. A majority of respondents had experience with strategic planning with either some components of a plan or a plan in development. Whether or not they have a complete or partial plan, they were able to offer insights into the advantages and challenges of strategic planning in small local governments.

More information on the strategic planning survey can be found in Appendix A.

Tables 2A, 2B, 2C: Survey Respondent Demographics

Type of Local Government (n=93)	Percentage
City	47%
County	9%
Town	44%

Population Range (n=95)	Percentage
0-5,000	36%
5,001-10,000	34%
10,001-15,000	14%
15,001-20,000	16%

Position Held by Respondent (n=95)	Percentage
County, city, town manager	65%
Assistant or deputy manager	13%
Department head	4%
Elected official	6%
Other (e.g., town clerk, interim appointment, retired manager)	12%

Why Do Strategic Planning?

“The strategic plan helps us decide where our energy and resources go.”

Sara McGuffin, Town Manager, Amherst, Virginia

From the survey, communities with strategic plans identified several benefits to having a strategic plan:

- The strategic plan provides clear guidance on the goals of the governing body to the manager.
- The strategic plan is used as a communication device for staff.
- The strategic plan communicates to employees that what they do is important and has a purpose.
- The strategic plan helps local government managers prioritize the work in the organization and the limited financial resources available during the budget process.
- Local government managers stated the strategic plan has helped the elected officials make decisions on controversial issues.

The benefits of having a strategic plan have been documented in previous reports and articles^{2,3,4,5,6} and are identified in three major categories for the purpose of this research project: as an accountability tool, a prioritization tool, and a communication tool.

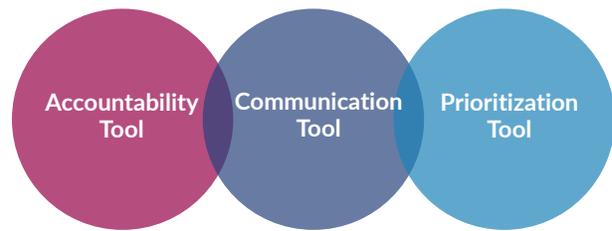
As an Accountability Tool

“We use the strategic plan as an accountability tool in the manager’s and deputy’s annual evaluation.”

Cindy Mester, Assistant City Manager, Falls Church, Virginia

The strategic plan serves as a framework for the local government manager to achieve the goals and priorities of the governing body. From the survey, 91% of local governments who had a strategic plan agree the strategic plan provides clear guidance on the goals of the governing body to the manager. The framework provides the direction, goals, and strategies to accomplish the vision of the elected officials. As such, the strategic plan serves as an accountability tool in several ways. First, local government managers can report progress on goals and strategies in monthly or quarterly reports to the governing body. Reporting progress should be relatively simple, straightforward, and easy to understand. By providing regular updates in the elected officials meeting packets, there are no surprises on progress and elected officials are kept well informed.

Figure 1: Strategic Plan Benefits



Second, elected officials can use the strategic plan as part of their annual evaluation process of the local government manager. Both the manager and the elected officials can discuss the goals achieved or accomplishments over the past year and can discuss improvements, successes, and challenges in the context of the goals and strategies adopted by the governing body.

Finally, providing regular updates in the governing body’s packet also provides updates to the public. Residents can track progress on projects, goals, and strategies on a regular basis. This activity provides a level of transparency as well, giving real-time information on key issues in the community.

As a Prioritization Tool

“If you don’t prioritize, council may prioritize everything and that can’t be done.”

Joshua Farrar, Town Manager, Ashland, Virginia

A key benefit to a strategic plan is the ability to prioritize resources to achieve the goals of the community. Of the respondents to the survey who had a strategic plan, 83% agreed the strategic plan is used as a prioritization tool for the work in the organization, 79% agreed it helped prioritize budget requests, and 85% agreed it helped them prioritize staff and financial resources as the manager. Using a strategic plan as a prioritization tool ensures that the staff, elected officials, and the local government manager are working together on the same goals and works in several ways. First, the local government manager can allocate staff resources to the priorities of the governing body. As vacancies arise, the manager, in consultation with key department heads, can evaluate the position and duties and determine if the position should be reclassified or reallocated to a different department or function to support the goals of the elected officials.

Second, the elected officials can appropriate financial resources through the annual budget process to support

their agreed upon priorities as identified in the strategic plan. Stevenson, Washington, developed a strategic plan to help prioritize and plan for \$16 million in mandated sewer updates that were burdening their already limited budget. The use of the strategic plan in the budget process provides the local government manager with the justification for new positions, new programs, and new initiatives. In addition, as new financial resources are allocated toward the goals defined in the strategic plan, the elected officials can communicate with the community on how their tax dollars are being spent in accordance with the strategic plan.

Finally, the connection to the strategic plan and the financial resource allocation through the budget process also supports transparency in the use of public funds. The staff in the organization understand why dollars are used in certain areas as opposed to others and residents can clearly see how their tax dollars are being used to achieve the overall vision of the community. By utilizing the strategic plan as a “explanatory tool,” we can answer the question, “Why did they do that?”

As a Communication Tool

“For new councilmembers, the strategic plan is really helpful.”

Joshua Farrar, Town Manager, Ashland, Virginia

A strategic plan communicates the vision to both internal and external stakeholders in the community. Of the respondents to the survey who had a strategic plan, 89% agreed the strategic plan is used as a communication device for staff; 79% agreed that the strategic plan is used as a communication device for residents. Falls Church, Virginia, provides an annual report to the community on the progress of achieving the vision called the “Community Report Card.” A strategic plan is used to communicate to residents the vision of the elected officials and what they want to achieve as their representatives. The strategic plan communicates to the local government manager what is important and where to allocate staff and financial resources. Further, the strategic plan communicates to staff why they do what they do and how they support the vision of the governing body. As noted above, a strategic plan is very helpful to new councilmembers as a communication tool of the previous governing body’s vision for the community.

“I have been a city manager in four communities for over 24 years. In every community, a strategic plan was developed

and prioritized. This is my smallest populated community, and the strategic plan still works like it should; providing guidance and focus to local government policies and budget.”

Survey Respondent

Organizational Capacity Challenges in Small Communities

Small communities, defined as cities, counties, and towns with a population of 20,000 or below, face several challenges in the delivery of services in their communities.⁷ In general, they lack organizational capacity for strategic planning initiatives. Organizational capacity is composed of financial capacity, administrative capacity, and leadership capacity.⁸

Figure 2: Organizational Challenges in Small Communities



FINANCIAL CAPACITY

“In a small town, where we live hand to mouth, we can’t help but operate day-to-day. Strategic planning is a luxury we just can’t afford.”

Survey Respondent

Financial capacity refers to the level of financial resources available for local governments to spend on operational and capital needs. With limited financial capacity, local governments prioritize financial resources for mandated and direct services in their communities. For many small communities, the lack of financial capacity for discretionary funding initiatives is a major barrier to strategic planning. When faced with a broken water line or strategic planning services, most small communities understandably will choose to invest in infrastructure and delay the strategic planning process. As shown in Table 3, 64% of local government survey respondents who did not have a strategic plan agreed they do not have the

funding available for a strategic planning process. While the total body of respondents to this series of survey questions is small, results are still included in this section as a complement to interview perspectives.

Table 3: Financial Barriers to Strategic Planning Question

We do not have funding available for a strategic planning process. (n=17)	
Strongly disagree	12%
Somewhat disagree	12%
Neither agree nor disagree	12%
Somewhat agree	29%
Strongly agree	35%

ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

“...lots of things we could do, and we are trying to do...we just don't have the staff time to do everything...”

Survey Respondent

Administrative capacity refers to having the appropriate staff to deliver efficient and effective government services and the capability of those staff in terms of training, skills, and experience. The individual staff member's capacity to take on additional duties, such as support the logistics and planning efforts necessary for a strategic planning initiative, is challenging as they prioritize providing basic services daily.

In small communities, in contrast with large local governments, staff wear “many hats” and are responsible for a wide variety of services and programs. For many small communities, the lack of administrative capacity, in terms of number of staff and capabilities of staff, is a major barrier to strategic planning. Among local governments without a strategic plan shown in Table 4, 44% agreed they do not have the time to do a strategic plan and 42% agreed they do not have the staff expertise to do a strategic plan.

Table 4: Administrative Barriers to Strategic Planning

n=18	We do not have the time to do a strategic plan.	We do not have the staff expertise to do a strategic plan.
Strongly disagree	11%	18%
Somewhat disagree	11%	18%
Neither agree nor disagree	33%	24%
Somewhat agree	33%	18%
Strongly agree	11%	24%

LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

“If they (elected officials) are not ready to put the work in that is needed for strategic planning, it is a waste of time.”

Survey Respondent

Leadership capacity refers to the support of elected officials and local government managers to engage in a particular initiative or activity. Elected officials are the biggest barrier to any new local government initiative and without their support no initiative will be successful. Without elected officials support, there is little chance a new program, initiative or goal can be achieved. Of the respondents who did not have a strategic plan, shown in Table 5, 39% of local governments agreed that elected officials are not interested in developing a strategic plan.

However, an interesting finding from the interviews was that the local government managers who did not have strategic plans believed that their councilmembers or commission members generally agreed on the direction of the local government in terms of policy and budget decisions. Because there is consensus on general issues by the governing body, the local government managers did not believe they needed a strategic plan.

“The current council has a very good rhythm, no major problem, they know what they want.”

Survey Respondent

Local government managers without a strategic plan did say that a plan would be necessary if there was disagreement, or the governing body lacked consensus on issues. For some communities with challenging elected officials and a lack of consensus on the vision of the local government, a strategic plan can help navigate contention and refocus energy on the broad goals of the organization.

Table 5: Leadership Barriers to Strategic Planning

n=18	Elected officials are not interested in developing a strategic plan.	The elected officials cannot agree to do a strategic planning process.
Strongly disagree	17%	28%
Somewhat disagree	11%	11%
Neither agree nor disagree	33%	33%
Somewhat agree	33%	17%
Strongly agree	6%	11%

“Small towns and villages struggle implementing these plans, many times over power struggles that elected officials have, they lose power by committing to a long-term plan...”

Survey Respondent

Strategic Planning in Action

Strategic planning is an active process that engages elected officials and the local government manager and staff to develop a vision for the community.⁹ With over 89,400 general purpose and special purpose governments in the United States, there are 89,400 ways to deliver public services in communities.¹⁰ The findings of the survey and interviews are that each local government conducted a unique strategic planning process.

This section provides a road map for the development of a formal strategic plan for your community. For this report, a formal strategic plan is the document that is developed that details the mission, vision, values, and goals as adopted by the elected officials. Goals are supported by strategies to achieve those goals and serve as operationalized tasks. This model process assumes a fundamental core element of creating a strategic plan that includes a strategic planning committee and a retreat or event where the elements of a plan are developed.

While this report outlines a formal process small communities can follow to create a complete strategic plan, this might not be possible in your community for a variety of reasons. However, there is value in adopting aspects of a full strategic planning process to help steer your community. Some planning is better than none.

Key questions, helpful tips, and examples of strategic planning elements in the field are included throughout the following section, providing strategies to develop the strategic plan and to help everyone, including elected officials, through the process.

Look for these icons throughout the manual:

-  KEY QUESTIONS
-  TIPS
-  EXAMPLES

Initial Steps for Developing the Strategic Plan

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

The biggest challenge to strategic planning can be garnering elected official support and buy-in for the process and outcome. The mayor or chair may be key figures in moving the process forward. Have a conversation about some of the challenges your community is facing and how a strategic plan may help to guide resources in the organization to solve some of these key issues.

At this stage, the manager should work with the elected officials to define the purpose of the strategic plan and the audience. Typically, the strategic plan is a document that guides the activities of the organization toward the achievement of a vision for the community. It serves as an internal guide for the manager and staff. It is important for the elected officials to agree on the purpose because this information will inform the other steps in the process. If the terminology of a strategic plan is making your

Figure 3: The Strategic Planning Process



elected officials wary, try giving it a different name or integrating the components into existing structures like the annual budget. As one survey respondent shared, their “board is wary of a single strategic plan, but have essentially participated in developing a group of plans that together provide a strategic vision.”

TIPS

Elected officials can be resistant to developing a strategic plan for a variety of reasons, such as a fear of losing control or a lack of understanding the purpose. At the beginning of the process, take time to outline the benefits of creating a plan with your elected officials, such as:

- Serves as a communication device for elected officials, staff, and the public.
- Helps prioritize organizational work and the limited financial resources available.
- Serves as a decision-making tool for controversial issues.
- Creates clear guidance on the goals of the governing body to the manager and can serve as an accountability tool for their performance.

“We’re fond of saying that we don’t want buy-in, we want ownership. Our elected officials had ownership in the strategic plan because they directed staff to put it together and were involved in the process.”

Dallin Kimble, Administrative Officer, Mariposa County, California

KEY QUESTIONS

Elected Officials’ Support

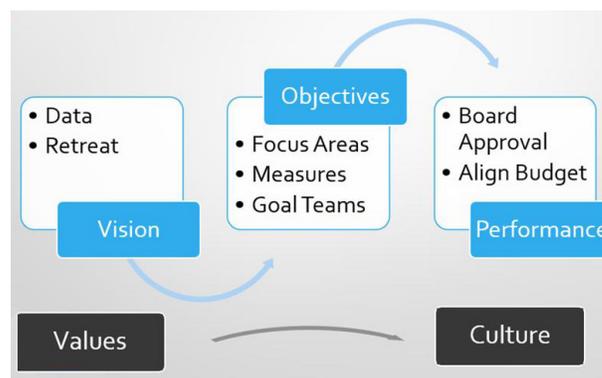
- Is there an advocate on the governing body that can help to garner support for the process?
- Do neighboring communities have a strategic plan?
If so, share the example.
- Will the strategic plan only be used as an internal document that is developed by the elected officials or as a document that includes resident input to the vision of the community?
- What other existing plans (i.e., budget, comprehensive plan, capital improvement plan) can inform the strategic plan?

ESTABLISHING A STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Once the elected officials have agreed to the idea of developing a strategic plan, a process should be established to guide the activities of the process. Typically, a strategic planning committee will be established for this task. This committee should include the elected officials, the manager, key deputies or assistants, and department heads.¹¹ For small communities, this may be the mayor, town, or city manager and one or two staff members. This committee should begin with a discussion establishing ground rules and defining the roles and responsibilities of the committee.

Figure 4: Mariposa County, California Strategic Planning Process

Source: Mariposa County, 2019



TIPS

Strategic planning processes can be perceived as “top down” and out of touch by staff responsible for implementing the plan. When possible, find ways to include staff from all levels of the organization throughout the process to help develop and check that the plan has meaning and practicality to the daily operations of your local government. This could be accomplished by including front-line staff on the strategic planning committee or by requiring committee members to update and solicit feedback from their staff throughout the planning process.



EXAMPLES

Both Lindenhurst and Mariposa County included staff early in the planning process using focus groups. Lindenhurst began its process with a focus group that included staff and the community that informed their elected body's development of the mission, vision, and values of the community. Mariposa County had staff teams of six-eight members create the goals and strategies of each focus area of their strategic plan



KEY QUESTIONS

Strategic Planning Committee

- Should elected officials be on the planning committee?
- Which staff should be members of the planning committee?
- Who will be the coordinator of the planning committee?
- How frequently will the committee meet?
- Have you clearly defined the roles and responsibilities of the committee? What are the expectations of the committee and what are the deliverables?

DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Determining the elected officials' preferences on community engagement is a key decision for the start of the process.¹² Thinking about community engagement in

the strategic planning process, there are generally four levels: inform, consult, collaborate, and empower.¹³ Local governments often prefer the inform or consult levels of engagement, particularly if this is a new initiative. If the elected officials use the inform method of community engagement, then social media, print materials, fact sheets, and website distribution are key methods to showcase the proposed plan and obtain community input. If the elected officials want to use the consult method of community engagement, then create a community survey and set up town hall meetings and focus groups. For small communities, these activities may be only one or two meetings given the size of the community.



TIPS

The strategic plan is the elected official's vision for the community and the local government organization. Community input, whether formal or informal, provides guidance in the development of the plan, building credibility for residents.¹⁴ Community focus groups can be utilized at different points in the planning process as a way to connect the strategic plan to residents and were common methods of engagement in the case study communities. Whether you use formal or informal engagement, find a clear connection to community input to your strategic plan. At the very least, other initiatives, such as community engagement surveys or comprehensive plans that include an engagement process, can feed into the strategic plan and provide that link.

Figure 5: Levels of Community Engagement

Source: Trent, Sheryl (2021). How to Facilitate Inclusive Community Outreach and Engagement. *Public Management Magazine*.

<p>INFORM Providing balanced and objective information through various channels.</p> <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media: newspapers, TV, social media • Print material: brochures, fact sheets • Website • Open house 	<p>CONSULT Obtaining input and feedback from community members to help identify needs and assets, set priorities or make decisions.</p> <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident panel • Networking • Community survey • Focus groups
<p>COLLABORATE Partnering with community members in an ongoing, interactional process of planning and decision-making; community members provide advice, innovation and recommendations that are reflected in the final outcomes.</p> <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory/steering committee • Policy roundtable • Consensus-building events 	<p>EMPOWER Providing support to enable community members to define issues and create solutions. Community members lead and control the process.</p> <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community coalitions • Citizen committees • Neighborhood associations

Community Engagement



EXAMPLES

For their initial strategic plan, Stevenson, Washington, leveraged the community input gathered from their comprehensive plan process, but plan to include an improved community engagement process in their next update.

Rolesville, North Carolina, held two facilitated community input sessions at the outset of the planning process to obtain feedback directly from residents and stakeholders in the community about their vision for the future of Rolesville.



KEY QUESTIONS

Level of Community Engagement

- Is the strategic plan seen more as internal guidance, or more of a public document? How should our engagement strategy change?
- Inform: Does the governing body want to develop the strategic plan and then get community input on the plan?
- Consult: Does the governing body want to obtain community perspectives prior to the strategic planning retreat? Where might the public provide the most useful guidance in this process?
- None: Does the governing body feel comfortable moving forward with the process without formal community engagement? If so, what previous processes, if any, are feeding into the strategic plan, and how was the public involved in those processes?

DETERMINING PREFERENCES FOR FACILITATION

A key question for the strategic planning initiative is to determine if an outside facilitator will be engaged in the process. To ease the administrative burden on staff, almost 60% of governments responding to the planning survey used an outside facilitator. Outside facilitation can be expensive, so you will need to develop a request for proposals to obtain service and cost estimates for outside facilitators. You might also consider university and college resources or community members who specialize in group facilitation. Look to resources like your surrounding communities, state associations, or ICMA for sharing information on other community's facilitation experience, including a sample request for proposal.



KEY QUESTIONS

Facilitation

- Should we use a facilitator or in-house staff to facilitate the process? Can we bring in a facilitator at certain points in the process or should they be there from start to finish?
- If we use a facilitator, how much would that cost?
- If we use a facilitator, how will we procure this?
- Are there other communities that have a sample request for proposal as a guide?
- What resources have other local governments used in my region?



TIPS

Choosing to engage a facilitator is one decision, but finding the right facilitator is another. Ideally, you will want someone experienced and familiar with the unique constraints of small communities who can easily build a rapport with your elected officials and key personnel. If you decide to hire a facilitator, engage your strategic planning committee in the process of selecting one and ask potential facilitators these questions:

- What experience do you have working in small communities and within their unique constraints?
- What facilitation style do you utilize? Do you follow academic theory or are you more flexible?
- What kind of questions do you like to ask the group? How do you encourage deep conversation during the planning process?
- How do you move from discussions to action?
- What local governments can we contact for references?

CONSIDERING THE COSTS AND FUNDING AVAILABLE

One challenge for the development of a strategic plan is the cost. The case study communities provided information on the costs of their strategic plan ranging from \$2,000 to \$19,000. This amount does not include staff time or other indirect financial resources utilized for the process.

Many factors can influence the cost of strategic planning, including the level of citizen engagement, use and choice of a facilitator, and the length and location of the process. While there are many ways to structure the process, focusing on intentional community engagement and limiting the time a facilitator is engaged can be key factors in keeping costs low. Finding ways to couple strategic planning with existing processes like the budget may be additional ways to capitalize costs.

KEY QUESTIONS

Funding the Strategic Plan

- Are you using a facilitator?
- Are you developing a survey for residents?
- Is there a cost for the location/facility for the retreat?
- Do we have funding available for this process? Do we have surplus funds we could use for the process? Do we request additional funding for the process?



EXAMPLES

While a price tag of \$19,000 to create a plan can seem overwhelming, Stevenson made it work with a small investment of \$2,000 by hiring an outside facilitator to run the retreat and using staff to complete other components of the process. Costs listed here include expenses associated with the planning process, such as citizen engagement, facilitation, and retreats.

Table 6: Sample Strategic Planning Budgets

Local Government	Cost	Inclusion
Mariposa County, CA	\$19,000	Consultant facilitator for retreat, community survey
Town of Vinton, VA	\$2,000	Consultant facilitator for retreat
City of Stevenson, WA	\$2,000	Consultant facilitator for retreat
Village of Lindenhurst, IL	\$16,900	University facilitator for retreat and development, community survey, and focus groups
Town of Rolesville, NC	\$16,200	University facilitator for retreat and development, community focus groups

CONDUCTING A STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES (SWOC) ANALYSIS

Have each elected official individually conduct a SWOC analysis exercise prior to the strategic planning retreat to save time and to ensure complete and thoughtful responses. The purpose of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges analysis is to assess the internal and external factors that impact the local government's ability to achieve the elected officials' vision. Elected officials can brainstorm in a word document or on paper, but the purpose is to gather their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities that are facing the local government, both internally and externally. This analysis will be used as a baseline and guide the development of the strategic plan. You will need to ensure enough time to gather the SWOC analysis data and compile the information prior to the strategic planning retreat.

KEY QUESTIONS

SWOC Analysis

- Have you developed a template for the SWOC analysis?
- How will you compile the information from all the elected officials?
- Have you allowed for sufficient time for this to be completed and shared prior to the strategic planning retreat?



TIPS

While it may seem daunting to invite input on negative topics, it is critical to clearly define problems facing your community that need to be addressed to achieve your vision. Local governments face complex, multifaceted issues and the SWOC analysis is your opportunity to dissect and clarify these problems. Once a problem is defined, causes and their prospective solutions help create your goals and strategies.



EXAMPLES

The Government Financial Officer Association (GFOA) and ICMA's "Defining the Problem" offers an additional resource to help further define problems more clearly that include six design principals: reject zero-sum thinking, provide procedural justice, create psychological safety, recognize and mitigate cognitive biases, go beyond positions, and understand interests and introduce constraints.

Table 7 shows a simple SWOC analysis framework that has been used in small communities and can be used as is or tailored to your community as needed.

Table 7: SWOC Analysis Framework

Strengths	Weaknesses
What are our major internal or present strengths?	What are our major internal or present weaknesses?
Opportunities	Challenges
What major external or future opportunities do we have?	What major external or future challenges do we face?

PLANNING FOR THE LOGISTICS

Once the committee has been formed and questions related to cost/budget, level of community engagement, and outside facilitator or in-house staff have been determined, the next step is to schedule a strategic planning retreat. There are nuances to discuss with your planning committee on where to hold the retreat.

Table 8: Strategic Plan Components

Strategic Plan Component	Answer the Question	Description
Mission	What do we do today?	The mission states what the local government does now; it communicates to residents, businesses, nonprofits, and other key interest groups what you do on a day-to-day basis.
Vision	What do we want our community to look like in 10-15 years?	The vision states what you want your community to look like in 10-15 years; it communicates to the external environment what you want to achieve and how the governing body sees itself in the future.
Values	What values are important to the governing body when we make a decision?	The values (typically four-five values) communicate guiding principles that the governing body uses to make decisions for the community (ethics, efficiency, equity, etc.).
Goals	What are the goals to make progress toward our vision?	The goals are broad statements or affirmations the governing body agrees on to achieve the vision of the community.
Strategies	What do we need to do now to achieve those goals?	Strategies are action items that establish how you will achieve those goals in the next one-two years.

Generally, the event should be held in a site outside your normal setting to help focus the group on the task at hand. This can be another facility you own or an off-site space, depending on what the budget allows.

If your local government has chosen to use the consult method of community engagement, this is the time to send surveys and hold town halls or focus groups to gather community input. You will need to ensure enough time to gather community input and compile that information prior to the strategic planning retreat.



EXAMPLES

Vinton, Virginia, kept costs low by hosting the retreat in a facility they owned, providing their own supplies like snacks and writing material, hiring a facilitator from a local nonprofit, and limiting on-site time to half a day by emphasizing preliminary work.



KEY QUESTIONS

Planning for the Logistics

- Where will the retreat be held? At an on-site or off-site location?
- What are your open meeting requirements for publicizing and accessibility? Have you reviewed and summarized community engagement data and SWOC analysis if applicable?
- What advance arrangements need to be made for supplies, refreshments, A/V equipment, etc.?

STRUCTURING THE RETREAT

The purpose of the retreat is to develop the strategic plan and the deliverable at the end of the meeting should be a draft that includes a mission, vision, values statement or values, goals, and strategies to achieve the goals. The retreat should include an agenda with time allocations for the individual components of the strategic plan. Appropriate materials such as flip charts, markers, post-it notes, pens, etc., should be provided at the meeting.

TIPS

Don't forget to plan for documenting the discussion, and don't put this burden on those expected to actively contribute to it. Whether the strategic planning retreat is a few hours one afternoon or spans across multiple days, it will be a dense conversation with rich information to pull from. It is important to establish how the meeting will be captured and who is responsible. Outline a record keeping plan with staff or your hired facilitator in advance and clarify deliverables expected following the meeting.

KEY QUESTIONS

Structuring the Retreat

- Have you or the facilitator developed ground rules on the engagement among the elected officials during the retreat (all ideas are judgment free, respect for diverse opinions, etc.)?
- Have you or the facilitator developed an agenda with key components identified?
- Have you or the facilitator planned for time allocated to each component?
- Who will take notes and compile the information during the retreat?
- Who will be responsible for compilation of the strategic plan after the retreat?
- What is the timeline for a draft plan to be developed?

Developing the Strategic Plan

DEVELOPING THE MISSION

The mission statement is typically defined as the reason the local government exists. The mission statement communicates the purpose of the local government to residents, staff, and other key stakeholders. The mission statement clearly states what your local government does, why you provide those services, and for whom. When you draft the mission statement, consider if it answers the questions: “Who are we? What do we do? For whom we do it? Why is it important?” The mission statement should be easily understandable, clear, and concise and does not need to be updated regularly.

KEY QUESTIONS

Mission Statement

- What do you do?
- Why do you do it?
- Who do you serve?
- Why is it important?
- Is it clear, concise, and understandable?

Examples of Mission Statements

Village of Lindenhurst, Illinois

The Village of Lindenhurst, in partnership with our community, continuously strives to provide a safe, healthy, and vibrant environment through quality customer service, public safety, progressive leadership, and financial responsibility.

Town of Vinton, Virginia

The Town of Vinton provides valuable services to residents, visitors, and businesses through transparent, efficient, and responsible governance while protecting its unique character and values.

Mariposa County, California

We improve the quality of life in Mariposa County through active community engagement and the efficient delivery of outstanding public services.

Town of Crewe, Virginia

To provide quality services to residents, businesses, and visitors in an efficient, effective, and equitable manner.

Town of Woodstock, Virginia

To encourage and facilitate economic growth, to provide a safe environment for a diverse community, and to provide high quality and efficient services to the public,

while emphasizing the Town's unique character, planning for the future, and leading by example through the implementation of best practices.

DEVELOPING THE VISION

The vision statement reflects the governing body's view of the ideal community in 10-15 years. This statement communicates the governing body's picture of success and serves as the “goal post” to be achieved. The vision statement should answer the question, “Where do you want to be in 15 years?” It should provide a clear picture of the organization's future and does not need to be updated every year.¹⁵

KEY QUESTIONS

Vision

- Is it inspiring for the residents and staff?
- Is it believable?
- Does it answer the question: Where do we want to be in 15 years?
- Is it clear, concise, and understandable?

Examples of Vision Statements

City of Williamsburg, Virginia

One Williamsburg that is courageously leading, innovating a modern city, prioritizing safety and wellness, engaging our partners while connecting the world.

Village of Lindenhurst, Illinois

The Village of Lindenhurst endeavors to be the friendliest and most appealing community in Lake County, Illinois; enriched by small-town values and traditions, fostering an atmosphere where residents and businesses can thrive.

City of York, South Carolina

York is an historic city with charming neighborhoods, caring residents, abundant opportunities, and an innovative and inclusive economy.

Town of Rolesville, North Carolina

Genuine community thrives in Rolesville as we seek to build a place that is focused on walkability, with connections to parks, greenways, and gathering spaces.

ESTABLISHING VALUES

The adoption of core values as a part of the strategic plan reflects the foundations underpinning policy decisions and actions taken by the governing body. The values (or values statement) are a tool to build organizational culture and should communicate to the public what is

important to the elected officials when they are making decisions. The values or values statement express the behavioral expectations in the day-to-day operations of the local government, whereas the mission and vision communicate the aspirations of the local government.

KEY QUESTIONS

Values/Values Statement

- What do the values say about what is important to the governing body?
- What do the values say about what is important to your community?
- Are the values reflected in decision making?

Examples of Values

Town of Ashland, Virginia

Sustainability, Community, Integrity, Equity, and Excellence

Mariposa County, California

Collaboration, Integrity, Sustainability, Transparency, Excellence

Town of Rolesville, North Carolina

Inclusive, Collaborative, Ethical, Transparent, Excellent

DEVELOPING GOALS

Goals are developed and adopted by the governing body and communicate broad initiatives or activities. Goals should be a two-four-year view of priorities that the local government establishes to achieve the vision of the community.

TIPS

There is a tendency to become overly prescriptive when creating goals. As goals look two-four years in the future, there should be room for flexibility to accommodate for changing circumstances.¹⁶ Additionally, goals that are too specific may be rooted in current governmental practices, rather than encouraging innovation and creativity. Focus on creating three-five goals that describe guardrails rather than specific actions.

KEY QUESTIONS

Goals

- Do the goals support the mission and vision?
- Are the goals realistic?
- Are they easy to read and understand?
- Are they measurable?

Figure 6: Town of Rolesville, North Carolina's Goals or Key Focus Areas

Source: Town of Rolesville, 2020



“We’ve debated back and forth between a thorough plan with estimated budgets, specific performance targets and timelines, and a simpler conceptual plan. For our first time, we opted for simple and now think we should make it even more simple. One page would be ideal to make it a frequent reference that is easy to remember and use.”

Dallin Kimble, Administrative Officer, Mariposa County, California

Examples of Goals

Town of South Boston, Virginia

- Reinvent Riverdale as a gateway park.
- Remove and redevelop blighted and derelict buildings.
- Revitalize downtown/redevelop Randolph Hotel.
- Improve Westside/Westend services.
- Create a succession/contingency plan.

Village of Gambier, Ohio

- Support a vibrant mix of institutional and village-serving land uses that respect environmental restraints, promote a high quality of life, and plan for long-term growth.
- Preserve, enhance, and market Gambier’s natural resources, parks, and trails as vital community assets.
- Preserve existing neighborhoods while increasing opportunities for diverse housing options within the village and conservation development on future residential land.
- Promote an identity that encourages collaboration, fosters community spirit, and capitalizes on Gambier’s historic and environmental strengths.
- Strengthen the built environment to safely and efficiently move people, goods, and services within the village and to regional destinations.

City of Emporia, Virginia

- Pursue economic development opportunities through collaboration and partnerships to increase and improve employment for our residents.
- Support a culture of educational achievement and lifelong learning in order to develop and sustain a productive workforce ready for the 21st century employers.

- Develop cultural facilities while supporting our existing recreational providers.
- Vitalize the overall appearance of the city to create an atmosphere that is attractive and appealing to residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Upgrade infrastructure throughout the city.

Town of Vinton, Virginia

- Enhance the town’s infrastructure and livability.
- Maintain an efficient and high-performing government.
- Ensure the town’s continued financial viability by actively pursuing quality economic development.

City of York, South Carolina

- Resilient Infrastructure
- Economic Development
- Dynamic Community
- Efficient and Effective Government

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES

Strategies are the action steps needed to be taken to achieve the broad goals of the community.¹⁷ The strategies describe specific tasks, outputs and/or outcomes, typically within a one-two-year completion period. The number of strategies assigned to each goal will vary and are typically between three and seven.

KEY QUESTIONS

Strategies

- Are the strategies realistic in terms of budget?
- Do the strategies identify a time frame for completion?
- Have key personnel responsible for those strategies been identified?
- Can you, as the manager, report progress to the elected officials?

EXAMPLES

Rolesville, North Carolina, leadership developed specific workplans that could be addressed to achieve goals in a two-year work period. These initiatives are collected into the Staff Progress Report, which is updated three times a year and provided to the governing board in their agenda packet and publicly posted on the town’s website.

Examples of Strategies

City of York, South Carolina

- Review and deploy advanced meter reading technology through city-wide implementation of a wireless meter reading system.
- Provide tools for customers to better understand utility usage.
- Develop programs to assist low-to-moderate income households with utility bills and infrastructure improvements.

Village of Lindenhurst, Illinois

Explore the possibility of implementing a TIF District to help with redeveloping Linden Plaza/Grand Avenue commercial corridor.

Town of Woodstock, Virginia

- Conduct an economic base analysis.
- Support an evaluation by a qualified firm or other professional to identify strategies that will help the town strengthen economic development opportunities.

Town of Vinton, Virginia

- Aggressively pursue economic development opportunities to enhance local retail and dining options.
- Conduct a thorough organizational efficiency review in municipal offices and implement changes based on results.

City of Stevenson, Washington

- The city will continue working toward lifting the commercial sewer connection moratorium, building efficient, sustainable, and affordable wastewater system updates with added BOD capacity by the spring of 2023.
- The city will partner with Skamania County Fire District 2 and the Skamania County Department of Emergency Management to build a new fire hall that meets the needs of the agencies, is affordable to the community, and is a valued asset of Rock Creek Drive.

We Have a Strategic Plan, Now What?

Developing a strategic plan is just the beginning. Finding ways to integrate the plan into daily processes and decision-making is key to making the plan meaningful. Adjustments will need to be made to keep the strategic plan relevant and a “living document.”

Adopting the Strategic Plan

Provide the draft document to the governing body for any corrections, amendments, or changes. Because the strategic plan reflects the vision of the elected officials, they should have an opportunity to comment on the draft report prior to distribution to the public or others.

If your local government is using the inform method of community engagement, once the governing body has completed review and changes have been incorporated, the draft document should be distributed through the local government’s website, social media, and print to gather community input on the draft strategic planning document. If your local government is not utilizing community engagement for the process, the document can be approved at the next governing body meeting and posted to the local government’s website, social media, and print media for distribution.

EXAMPLES

Once the Town of Rolesville, North Carolina, had adopted their strategic plan, they focused on regular communication to keep the plan alive and relevant. They created 11” x 17” copies of the plan and placed them in front of the elected officials at all board meetings, hung them on staff bulletin boards, and included copies in their new hire onboarding packets. According to Town Administrator Kelly Arnold, “These easy-to-find copies of the plan help ensure it remains accessible to all and relevant to decision-making.”

KEY QUESTIONS

Adopting the Strategic Plan

- Did the governing body adopt the strategic plan through a formal vote?
- Have you placed the adopted strategic plan on your website?
- Are there copies available in the town hall or administration building?
- Have you posted to the local government’s social media pages?
- Can you meet with a local newspaper reporter and conduct an interview on the plan?

Figure 7: Village of Lindenhurst, Illinois Online Dashboard

Source: Village of Lindenhurst, 2022

Community Branding & Engagement		
Goal	% Complete	Notes
Enhance communication & engagement between Village & community	<div style="width: 60%;"></div>	60 Instituted Communications Plan; Began using Buffer and other programs to increase visibility
Work to engage stakeholders to create a community brand & defined identity for Village	<div style="width: 5%;"></div>	5 Using focus group information to jump start brand identity
Capital Infrastructure Planning & Improvements		
Goal	% Complete	Notes
Implement a long term Capital Improvement Plan focused on proactive infrastructure repairs & sustainability	<div style="width: 15%;"></div>	15 Capital improvement plan forecasts certain capital expenditures, reviewing Public Works software for better asset management
Explore possibilities & workable approaches to mitigate flooding issues	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>	50 Instituted Culvert Replacement Program
Prioritize current stormwater needs & develop plan to fund and implement stormwater projects	<div style="width: 80%;"></div>	80 Projects prioritized and list is funded partially annually
Business Recruitment & Retention		
Goal	% Complete	Notes
Explore the possibility of implementing a TIF district to help with redeveloping Linden Plaza/ Grand Commercial corridor	<div style="width: 100%;"></div>	100 TIF Adopted 5/9/22
Identify and explore business attraction strategies	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>	50 N/A
Develop and implement a redevelopment plan for Linden Plaza and Grand Avenue commercial corridor	<div style="width: 40%;"></div>	40 May be included in feasibility study
Execute identified business attraction strategies	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	10 N/A
Responsible Growth & Development		
Goal	% Complete	Notes
Exploring annexing property, especially at Routes 132 & 45 to establish defined boundaries	<div style="width: 20%;"></div>	20 Initial conversations have been conducted
Innovative Planning & Practices		
Goal	% Complete	Notes
Conduct an organizational review and advancement study to evaluate staff roles and responsibilities; identify efficiencies, explore technology upgrades and improvements	<div style="width: 15%;"></div>	15 N/A
Continue to explore and evaluate potential additional revenue sources	<div style="width: 20%;"></div>	20 Enterprise fund fees and charges evaluated

Reporting on Progress

Timelines, staff responsibilities, and budget impacts should be included within the plan or as supplementary resources. This can be used by the local government manager to report progress to the governing body. In addition, local government managers can use this as a discussion tool in the annual evaluation meeting with the elected officials.

TIPS

Sometimes included goals become outdated and are no longer relevant. When reporting on the strategic plan, take time to identify any goals that are no longer serving the mission, vision, or values of the community and exclude them moving forward.

KEY QUESTIONS

Reporting on Progress

- Have your elected officials communicated how they would like progress reported?
- Will you report quarterly, monthly, once a year?
- What format will you use to report progress on the strategic plan?
- Will you use progress updates in your annual evaluation process?
- How will residents know about progress on goals and strategies in the community?

Table 9: Town Council Planning Retreat Summary – Saturday, January 12, 2019

Source: Town of Amherst, Virginia

Topic Area	Items to Accomplish by June 30, 2019	Work Plan for July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020	Goals for December 31, 2020	Long-Term Goals
Recodification	Town code recodification completed	Zoning and subdivision ordinance recodification	All code in Municode	
Pay Policies and Practices	Career development policy and COLA + merit (Step) policy implemented	Policies and practices implemented		
Brockman Park	Marketing material updated via Sweet Briar Partnership	Implement new marketing plan		Full capacity at Brockman Park
Town Park	Park available for "initial" public use	Formulate vision of park and implement vision	Create park and trail master plan	Implement park master plan
Town Square	Resurrect the project, work with stakeholders	Work with CVPDC to identify grant funding for the project	Project implementation	Implement town square
Trail	Complete project scope for water and sewer relocation	Relocate water and sewer	Construct the pedestrian/ bike trail to college	Provide recreational opportunities
Downtown	Create a vision for downtown	Identify strategies to implement vision for downtown	Implementation of vision for downtown	Effect downtown revitalization
Utilities		Committee to reconvene and start new negotiations	Implement new arrangements re water service to college	Implement new arrangements re sewer service to college
Police Department Building Renovation	Determine space utilization and develop RFP	Construction project out for bid, complete constructions		
Various	Move to paperless agendas; utilize tablets			Add attractions for young adults, new businesses, and housing options (i.e., for senior residents)
	YMCA: complete market analysis			More downtown events
	Improved capital improvement plan (CIP)			

EXAMPLES

Table 9 is an example of a small community's strategic plan with timelines. The manager uses this document to report to the town council monthly and uses this document during their annual evaluation. This is a simple spreadsheet that is easy to understand and easy to update.

Linking to the Budget

Once the strategic plan has been adopted, using the document to inform budget decisions is a key implementation tool for the local government. Over 80% of the respondents to the survey stated that the strategic plan is used to prioritize and justify budget requests during the annual budget process. For small communities, it may be a challenge to formally link the budget to the strategic plan but there are simple ways to accomplish this goal.

At the beginning of the budget process, review the strategic plan goals and strategies with the elected officials. Identify and prioritize budget requests and funding needs based on how they align with the goals and strategies in the strategic plan. A simple spreadsheet that lists the funding requests and identifies the corresponding goal is sufficient to communicate this information.¹⁸

KEY QUESTIONS

Linking to the Budget

- Have you identified funding requests and budget priorities prior to the start of the budget process?
- What format will you use to communicate funding allocations that support the goals of the governing body?
- Have you worked with department directors; do they understand how to connect their budget and funding requests to the strategic plan?

EXAMPLES

Rolesville, North Carolina, has been recognized by GFOA for their effort to incorporate their strategic plan into their annual budget conversation. Department heads are required to tie requests for new initiatives to the strategic plan. These linkages are further reinforced within the annual budget document to help communicate to the public how the strategic plan is being accomplished.

Table 10 consolidates the annual budget requests from departments for the town. Three of the five budget request support town goals/topic areas from the example used in the "reporting on progress" section above.

Elected officials can quickly see all requests, identify the connections to the strategic plan, and prioritize funding based on the connections to the strategic plan.

Table 10: Town Annual Budget Requests

Source: Town of Amherst, Virginia

Goal	Department	Budget Request	Funding Requested
Town Park	Parks and Recreation	Park and Trail Master Plan Development	\$50,000
Recodification	Administration	Municode Update	\$5,000
Brockman Park	Economic Development	Marketing Material	\$2,500
Utilities	Utilities	Administrative Assistant	\$30,000
Various	Administration	Internship Program	\$3,000

Updating the Strategic Plan

Once the initial plan has been developed, elected officials and managers inquire as to the frequency of updates to the strategic plan. Having a strategy for reviewing and updating your strategic plan is helpful—but this process is dependent on the local government, and as demonstrated in the report, all local governments are unique.

In the survey, local governments reported updating their strategic plans anywhere from annually up to every five years (Q8, Appendix A).

EXAMPLES

Rolesville, North Carolina, operates on a two-year cycle to correspond with local elections. This allows new the new town board to set their own short-term direction as they start their terms. While the mission and vision doesn't need to be updated annually, it may be appropriate to look at these components with a new board. Mariposa County set out hoping to update their plan annually but found in practice their first update happened 2.5 years after the initial adoption. Remaining flexible allowed them to spend limited staff time and resources when it will have the most impact.

TIPS

Avoid having your review process become too routine or just to “check a box.” Strategic plans and their goals should be flexible and shift when appropriate. Try different approaches to reviewing your strategic plan each time you update, focusing on key issues or aspects of the plan that invite conversation and change moving forward.

KEY QUESTIONS

Updating the Strategic Plan

- Has the governing body communicated to you, as the manager, when they want to update the full strategic plan?
- How will the update be similar to and different from the first strategic planning process?
- Do you need to plan for financial resources for the update in the upcoming budget?
- Will you need to hire a facilitator for the next update?
- What is a realistic timeline for you, as the local government manager, given the organizational capacity challenges in your community?

Conducting Performance Management

What is Performance Management?

“Performance management includes identifying, collecting, analyzing, and reporting on indicators that show how well the organization performs, both internally and in the delivery of services to the public, and how that performance compares with its targets or with peer organizations. More importantly, as a management tool, performance data is intended not as an end result, but rather as a means to more informed decision making and a more engaged community”

ICMA, *Getting Started in Performance Management*¹⁹

For small communities with limited financial and administrative capacity, the idea of a formal performance management system is overwhelming. The focus of this report is on developing a strategic plan and utilizing the plan in the budget process to inform decision-making and to support communities. However, performance management is often an important component of strategic planning and connects strongly to the goals and strategies of the strategic plan.^{20,21} As such, this report seeks to provide guidance to small communities on how to implement performance management easily, concisely, and clearly.

First, interviews with the local government managers revealed that performance management does take place in small communities, but it is often on an ad hoc or as needed basis as opposed to a formal, annual process. Managers reported that the task of collecting and analyzing data takes place when an issue arises.

What do small communities need to conduct ad hoc performance management?

Small communities reported in interviews that they recognize performance management in their day-to-day work, and for many local governments performance management means answering questions, such as:

- Are we coming in under budget?
- Did we meet our fund balance target?
- How long did it take to fix the water main break?
- What is our police department’s response time?
- How many people are participating in the summer program?

- How many books are being checked out at the library?
- How much is the city paying entry level police officers?

All those questions and ones like them can be a small community’s version of performance management. But small communities can start measuring performance by thinking about those questions in different ways, such as:

- What are our general fund budget and tax rates compared with other communities?
- What is our fund balance percentage as compared with other communities?
- How long does it take other communities to fix water main breaks?
- What are the response rates for police in other communities?
- Do other communities have summer programs? What kind? How long?
- What services do other community’s libraries provide?
- What are other communities paying entry level police officers?

By thinking about the issue your community is having and changing the question to “What are other communities doing?,” you can compare your local government to other communities that are similar in size and service to gauge your performance.

IDENTIFY BENCHMARK COMMUNITIES.

The first step is to identify benchmark communities. Benchmark communities are local governments that your local government competes with in terms of new employees, they share a border with your jurisdiction, and they are similar in size, budget, and services. Typically, local governments will identify five-seven local governments for comparison purposes.

Local government managers and key staff should develop a professional relationship with their counterparts in the benchmark communities to share data and information. Make sure you have their contact information for requesting information.

KEY QUESTIONS

Benchmark Communities

- Who do we “compete” with for employees and business?
- Which local governments do we share a jurisdictional boundary with?
- What other local governments have a similar population, budget, and service portfolio?

IDENTIFY COMMON QUESTIONS TO DEVELOP AN ANNUAL LIST OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES.

The next step is to identify frequently asked questions that are requested by the elected officials (i.e., tax rates, number of employees) and collect that data on an annual basis. Identify frequently asked questions by the manager to department heads (i.e., number of sidewalks maintained, capacity of wastewater treatment plan). The data collection will also provide your local government with trend information as you build three-five years of data. Managers and department heads should offer to share the information with the benchmark communities as well and can include findings in annual documents like the budget.

KEY QUESTIONS

Frequently Asked Questions

- What questions do I get asked frequently from elected officials?
- What information do I need from other local governments?
- What statistics are important to the elected officials?
- What data do we need on an annual basis, during the budget process, during the year?
- What are our general fund budget and tax rates compared with other communities?
- What is our fund balance percentage as compared with other communities?
- How long does it take other communities to fix water main breaks?
- What are the response rates for police in other communities?
- Do other communities have summer programs? What kind? How long?
- What services do other community's libraries provide?
- What are other communities paying entry level police officers?

PREPARE FOR AD HOC REQUESTS AT ANY GIVEN TIME BY STARTING SMALL.

With a list of benchmark communities and key contacts, local governments are now able to respond to ad hoc requests from elected officials or other key stakeholders for performance data. Most importantly, make sure you are asking the right question to the benchmark communities.

There are hundreds of performance measures that could be and are being compiled by local governments. Develop a list of 10 or fewer to begin with; think about the most frequent questions and start there.

CONSIDER WHAT TYPES OF MEASURES TO USE.

Table 11 below identifies three common performance measures, what they are measuring, and basic examples.²² It is important to recognize that one data point is insufficient to gather information; trend data meaning collection of data over a three-five-year period will inform you and the elected officials on activity—is it increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable. Starting now, your local government can begin to build a robust set of data for answering the most frequently asked questions.

Table 11: Sample Measure Types

Types of Measures	What are they measuring?	Examples
Workload	How many of something; raw counts of outputs	Calls received, work orders completed, zoning applications processed
Efficiency	Ratio, relationship between outputs and inputs, can be expressed in percentage	Cost per job reviewed, cost per capita, application processed per analyst, calls per police officer, building permits per inspector
Outcome	Effectiveness, obtains quality, if a program or service is having an impact	Resident satisfaction, impact of a program, response time of 5 minutes or less



EXAMPLES

Lindenhurst, Illinois, staff identified some measures that indicate performance with their overarching strategic planning themes. They update this data monthly to show elected officials and the broader public how they are performing in specific areas. Internally, their staff have a quarterly discussion to report on progress with action steps identified by the village's strategic plan.

Case Studies/Best Practices

As part of the survey distributed to local governments, respondents were asked to share their strategic plans and if they would be willing to serve as best practice communities for the report. After the data analysis was completed, five local governments from across the country were selected for more in-depth analysis of their process. The five local governments describe their strategic planning process in detail in the following section.



Mariposa County, California (Home of Yosemite)

Population: 17,100

Dallin Kimble, County Administrative Officer
(January 2017 – Present)

<https://www.mariposacounty.org/1780/Strategic-Plan>

What was the process?

Our strategic planning process began with data collection, including a community survey. After several informative presentations about different aspects of the county, the board of supervisors met with department heads and

then on their own to complete a facilitated analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. The board identified our mission, vision, values, and focus areas, along with a few key objectives for the future.

Staff then organized interdepartmental committees of six-eight staff for each focus area to flesh out the objectives and initiatives. The work of the committees was presented to the department heads and the CAO, who made a few minor tweaks primarily removing duplicates that appeared in multiple focus areas. The final draft was considered and approved by the board.

How did you obtain elected officials buy-in?

We're fond of saying that we don't want buy-in, we want ownership. Our elected officials had ownership in the strategic plan because they directed staff to put it together and were involved in the process.

How much did the process cost and did you use an outside facilitator?

We spent about \$11,000 on a community survey and about \$8,000 on a facilitator. We used primarily in-house staff except for the resources/costs noted above.

How much time to do the strategic planning process?

Our strategic plan took about six months to put together.

Did you engage residents in the process?

The county had recently completed a community-by-community process to gather input for the economic vitality strategy. Staff also conducted our first community survey, sought input on social media, and received public comment at various meetings along the way.

Did you use a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) analysis?

Yes.

Table 12: Comparison of Case Study Local Governments

Local Government	Population	Cost	Time for the Process	Facilitation	Community Engagement	SWOC Analysis	Updates	Reporting
Mariposa County, CA	17,100	\$8,000	6 months	In-house staff	Consult using survey data prior to the plan's creation	Yes	Annually	Annually
Town of Vinton, VA	8,128	\$2,000	6 months	Consultant	Inform residents after the plan was created	Yes	Annually	Annually
City of Stevenson, WA	1,700	\$2,000	9 months	Consultant	None	No	Annually	Annually
Village of Lindenhurst, IL	14,406	\$16,900	10 months	University	Consult using survey data and focus groups prior to the plan's creation	Yes	3-4 years	Monthly and Quarterly
Town of Rolesville, NC	9,359	\$16,200	3 months	University	Consult using community input sessions	Yes	2 years	Quarterly

How often do you update the strategic plan?

We aspire to update the strategic plan annually. In practice, we're beginning our first update of the plan about 2.5 years after adoption.

How often do you report progress on the strategic plan?

Progress on the strategic plan is reported annually and as significant milestones are reached.

Lessons learned or what you would do differently?

We've debated back and forth between a thorough plan with estimated budgets, specific performance targets and timelines, and a simpler conceptual plan. For our first time, we opted for simple and now think we should make it even more simple. One page would be ideal to make it a frequent reference that is easy to remember and use.

The right facilitator makes a big difference. We're glad we used a facilitator when we did; in the future, we would use facilitators in the staff committees as well. Along the way, we met several facilitators who were too academic or would not have been a good fit with our community and/or our staff. We also met a few who did, or we felt would have done excellent work consistent with our community.



Town of Vinton, Virginia

Population: 8,128

Richard "Pete" Peters, Town Manager
(January 2021 - Present)

[https://www.vintonva.gov/486/
Town-of-Vinton-Strategic-Plan-2020-2025](https://www.vintonva.gov/486/Town-of-Vinton-Strategic-Plan-2020-2025)

What was the process?

Over the past decade, Vinton had primarily conducted yearly planning retreats with members of staff and town council to develop annual goals and targets for establishing operating and budget priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. In 2020, the town underwent a

more comprehensive strategic plan update, with a desire to establish operating and budget priorities for the next five years (2021-2025).

How did you obtain elected officials buy-in?

Council supported the concept of establishing a longer-term planning document to provide more mid-range guidance to staff for CIP and operational planning. Annual planning to establish immediate priorities had been sufficient in recent years due to flat revenues—although given new revenue growth attributed to economic development projects, such as new restaurants and pari-mutuel gaming—a longer-term approach was necessary.

How much did the process cost and did you use an outside facilitator?

The town used a facility that it owned for the half-day retreat and the only expenses associated were snacks and the consultant contracted to facilitate the discussion and draft the written plan. The town contracted with Council of Community Services, a not-for-profit organization located in Roanoke that facilitates many community service activities on behalf of various local and state governments. The contract rate was \$2,000 for their work.

How much time to do the strategic planning process?

Council and staff met with the consultant over a half day, although the consultant had sent out surveys to participants several days in advance to establish much of the preliminary work.

Did you engage residents in the process?

Once a draft plan was created, council solicited feedback via requesting public comment on the concepts and direction of the strategic plan.

Did you use a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges (SWOC) analysis?

A SWOC was used as part of the preliminary feedback gathered by the initial surveys sent to council and staff.

How often do you update the strategic plan?

The plan is reviewed annually as part of the annual operation and CIP budget development, as budget priorities are being tied back to strategies associated with the strategic plan.

Lessons learned or what you would do differently?

The method that we undertook to develop the plan went extremely well and was a very efficient process. Council has been very supportive of the annual updating practices being tied to the annual budget adoption and are very pleased with the outcomes being accomplished by the document and the activities the plan has generated.



City of Stevenson, Washington

Population: 1,700

Leana Kinley, City Administrator
(September 2017 – Present)

<https://www.ci.stevenson.wa.us/citycouncil/page/council-strategic-goals>

What was the process?

Historically, the city goals and priorities were presented by department heads and discussed during the budget process. Leading up to the city's first strategic planning process, there were multiple projects that identified a need for the city to have a better long-range plan. During the update of the general sewer plan and facilities plan, the estimated cost to upgrade the city's system was \$16M and the residential base rates were projected to reach \$185/month. The upgrades were mandated by a state Department of Ecology Administrative Order issued to the city in 2017 for violations of its National Pollutant Discharge and Elimination System (NPDES) permit. At the same time, the city recently purchased land and was looking to design and build a new fire hall. There were also two recent street rebuild projects that moved forward without adequate improvements to the underlying water and sewer infrastructure. With limited staff and resources, decisions needed to be made on which projects were a priority and what needed to be pushed out or delayed.

With a new mayor and city administrator, we were looking to improve the planning process. Our first step was a half-day council retreat, facilitated by a community member, to set the stage for a strategic planning session. This was conducted two months into the mayor's first term (February 2018) and was a good starting off point to establish overall council direction.

In October of the same year, we held our day-and-a-half strategic planning retreat. Prior to the retreat, we sent out a survey on goals, priorities, and other feedback. It

consisted of an initial half-day session where we reviewed the previous goals from February, reviewed the survey, and proposed new goals and priorities. The next day, we reviewed the previous day, prioritized the goals, and developed strategies for meeting those goals. This was done by an outside facilitator and the result was a five-year strategic plan with a vision, mission, and SMART goals.

How did you obtain elected officials buy-in?

The mayor was on board to begin with and recent events at the city created the impetus for council to change direction and look at a better way to plan for the future.

How much did the process cost and did you use an outside facilitator?

We used a consultant who facilitated meetings for another local group. The cost was \$2,000 for their services.

How much time to do the strategic planning process?

The initial meeting was a day-and-a-half.

Did you engage residents in the process?

We have not engaged residents in this process yet. We are in the process of developing a community engagement and public participation plan that will be incorporated into this process.

Did you use a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges (SWOC) analysis?

No.

How often do you update the strategic plan?

Annually. Every year council holds a retreat, ideally in Q1, and goes over the progress on the plan and discusses changes. These are then reviewed and confirmed at the beginning of the budget process. All plans and updates can be found on our website <https://www.ci.stevenson.wa.us/citycouncil/page/council-strategic-goals> and the progress of past goals are listed in each subsequent plan.

How often do you report progress on the strategic plan?

Annually, see above.

Lessons learned or what you would do differently?

Going forward, there is a need to better involve the community on the strategic plan. Goals and priorities on the list were compared to the city's comprehensive plan, which has an engagement process, and they were not in conflict, but there was no public component of the strategic plan. When we come up on the end of the initial five-year plan, a reset will be needed, and we can incorporate an improved community engagement process to inform a new strategic plan.



Village of Lindenhurst, Illinois

Population: 14,406 (2020)

Clay Johnson, Village Administrator
(September 2017 - Present)

<https://www.lindenhurstil.org/department/division>

What was the process?

After contracting with the Center for Governmental Studies out of Northern Illinois University (NIU), the Village of Lindenhurst reached out to various community stakeholders, staff, and residents to set up a series of focus groups to gain feedback on village performance and direction. The feedback from those focus groups was compiled into a single document and presented to the village board in a planning workshop.

Using the information gained from the focus groups, the mayor and village trustees went through a number of analytical exercises during a workshop session to develop a series of priorities that respond to the themes of the focus groups and analyses. In that same workshop, the priorities were organized in terms of their completion date and complexity. Our partners at NIU took these goals, and then sent them to our elected officials to rank in terms of priority. The results of the prioritization were then shared with elected officials and staff.

Once again with the help of the representatives from NIU, staff reviewed the newly developed goals and prepared a series of action steps that led to accomplishing a particular goal. Each action step was assigned a primary staff lead and timelines were established for updates and goal completion. The action steps also included any resources or outside agency assistance that may be needed.

Finally, after all goals and action steps were completed, the full strategic plan was publicized and adopted by the village board. After adoption, staff sent the strategic plan to all those who participated in the planning process.

How did you obtain elected officials buy-in?

Our village board has always prioritized long-term planning, but never took the time to solicit feedback from stakeholders and staff to drive the strategic initiatives of the village. Convincing the board to move in this direction was not a challenge as we sought to engage our public to a greater degree and increase transparency of village initiatives.

How much did the process cost and did you use an outside facilitator?

The village used the Center for Governmental Studies at NIU as consultants for our strategic planning process. Their representatives coordinated with village staff and led all focus groups and facilitators of our strategic planning workshop. Once all the data was collected, our partners drafted the strategic plan and worked with staff on action steps that would be used to meet the overall tenets of the plan. Cost was \$16,900.

How much time to do the strategic planning process?

From the moment we began to collaborate with NIU, the process took about 10 months.

How did you engage residents?

Before we began our strategic planning process, the village engaged a company to conduct a statistically significant community survey that would indicate how the community feels about various aspects of our local governments' approach and services. The community survey was then used as a data point in our strategic planning session. One of the first steps of the strategic planning process was the creation of three focus groups to provide their feedback on a variety of areas. Each focus group was facilitated by a representative of NIU and no village elected staff or management were present in the room during discussion. One focus group was composed of village staff, another with community stakeholders (schools, park districts, Chamber of Commerce), and the final group was with Lindenhurst residents.

Did you use a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges (SWOC) analysis?

Yes, village board members, staff, and any attending public were divided into groups to each develop items that fit into a SWOC analysis. The group then reconvened to share their thoughts and ideas.

How often do you update the strategic plan?

We have not updated the plan as of yet, but we will likely update it every three-four years.

How often do you report progress on the strategic plan?

Village staff identified some measures that indicate performance with our overarching strategic planning

themes. We update this data monthly to show our elected officials and the broader public how we are performing in these specific areas. Internally, our staff has a quarterly discussion to report on progress with action steps identified by the village's strategic plan.



Town of Rolesville, North Carolina

Population: 9,359

Kelly Arnold, Town Administrator
(June 2018 - Present)

Amy Stevens, Finance Director
(2012 - Present)

<https://www.rolesvillenc.gov/strategic-plan>

What is the process?

Rolesville's governing board embarked on the development of a comprehensive strategic plan in late 2019. Since early 2017, the town had identified a simple series of goals and objectives that were updated annually through an informal process. These goals were generally completed as part of an annual budget retreat with the town board and town manager.

With a relatively new manager and board taking office after the November 2019 election, the town targeted the period of November 2019 through February 2020 to initiate and complete a more comprehensive, long-term strategic plan with a two-year work program.

After the November 2019 election, town staff worked with the consultant to create a systematic approach that would produce the desired product over a three-month span. The February 2020 completion time frame would allow the strategic plan to be used and featured in the budget development for the 2020-21 fiscal year, which started July 1, 2020.

Over the course of the three-month period, the following activities took place:

- Initial full-day retreat with the governing board, consultant, and lead staff to conduct a regional forecasting exercise and a SWOC analysis of the community and organization. The group began creating consensus around a community vision and high-level goals.
- Two facilitated community input sessions to obtain feedback directly from residents and stakeholders in the community about their vision for the future of Rolesville. To maximize participation, one session was held during the business day and one session was held in the evening.
- Half-day facilitated discussion with town manager and department heads to create consensus around a mission statement and core values, which are the more internally focused components of the town's strategic plan.
- Final full-day retreat with the governing board, consultant, and lead staff to review the work from the community and staff input sessions. The primary objective of this session was to refine and finalize the essential elements of the strategic plan.
- Presentation and adoption of the strategic plan components at the governing board meetings in March 2020, which led to the development of materials that are now used as part of the strategic plan.

The primary components of the adopted strategic plan that are essential to implementation are: the vision statement, four key focus areas, 16 goals, and the mission and core values of the internal organization.

How much did the process cost and did you use an outside facilitator?

In the fall of 2019, the board initiated a consultant selection process. This process called for experienced consultants to submit a request for proposal to assist with the development of the plan. A subcommittee with representation by the mayor, a town commissioner, and staff was formed, and this subcommittee conducted an interview process with the top candidates. The University of North Carolina School of Government was chosen for their experience, proposed process, and pricing. Their proposed process called for the School of Government consultants to direct development of the planning process, lead the facilitation of governing board and community input, and create the framework for the strategic plan. The cost for the services and materials was \$16,200.

How often do you update the strategic plan?

Over the course of the past two years, the strategic plan has been treated as an important roadmap providing clear guidance for the decision-making process regarding policy

adoption and budget development. The plan is referenced as part of cover memos that are written for governing board agenda items, and staff members routinely develop recommendations based upon whether the policy is in alignment with the strategic plan.

How often do you report progress on the strategic plan?

After the adoption of the strategic plan, town leadership further developed specific work plan priorities that could be addressed over the immediate two-year work period. These initiatives were collected into the staff progress report, which is updated three times a year and provided to the governing board in their agenda packet and posted on the town's public website.

Regular communication has been an important factor in keeping the plan alive and relevant. The key components were formatted into an 11" x 17" document that could be folded and used as a brochure or opened and used as a desk blotter or poster. A laminated version of the plan sits in front of elected officials at all board meetings. Copies of the plan were made available to staff and are part of the new hire onboarding packet. Staff members have copies of the strategic plan hanging on walls and bulletin boards. These easy-to-find copies of the plan help ensure it remains accessible to all and relevant to decision-making.

The strategic plan has been incorporated into the annual budget conversation. Department heads know that requests for new initiatives and staff should be tied to the strategic plan to be successful. These linkages are further reinforced within the annual budget document. With the

receipt of the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) 2021 Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, the town was recognized for meeting their standards for clearly communicating its strategic goals and the action plans developed to accomplish those goals.

Next Strategic Plan Cycle

For Rolesville, there is a two-year cycle associated with the strategic plan. While the vision statement is focused on the long-term development of the community, the specific goals and work plans are more suited to a shorter cycle of review and modification. A two-year cycle nicely corresponds with local elections and allows a new town board to set their own short-term direction as they start their terms.

The next strategic plan update, scheduled for late 2021, will follow a similar November through February time frame, but it will be more focused on minor modifications. Since this is a more limited scope of work, it will be facilitated by staff instead of an outside consultant. In the future, a more significant strategic plan process will proceed either due to the passage of time (i.e., the strategic plan is at least four years old) or a significant change of town board membership.

Going forward, there is a desire for the next major iteration of the strategic plan to include more participation of the staff leadership team, improved development of metrics to identify plan success, and incorporation of a biannual community survey in the alternating years.

Appendix A

Strategic Planning for Small Communities Survey

The strategic planning survey, distributed in August 2021, provided a snapshot of strategic planning initiatives in small communities throughout the United States. The survey was completed by local government officials in 24 of the 50 States, the District of Columbia and one international respondent.

The respondents included local government managers, assistants or deputy managers, department heads, elected officials and others including clerks, interim managers, and retired managers. The respondents represented a balance of city, county, and town local governments and over 68% were from communities with populations less than 10,000.

Q1 Is your local government a city, county, or town?		
Local Government Type	Percentage	Number
City	47.3%	44
County	9.7%	9
Town	43.0%	40
Total	100%	93

Q2 What is your local government's population?		
Answer	Percentage	Number
0-5,000	35.8%	34
5,001-10,000	33.7%	32
10,001-15,000	14.7%	14
15,001-20,000	15.8%	15
Total	100%	95

Q3 | What state or country represented?

Answer	Number
Alaska	3
California	4
Colorado	2
Connecticut	1
Delaware	1
Florida	2
Illinois	5
Indiana	1
Iowa	2
Maine	2
Maryland	2
Massachusetts	1
Michigan	2
Minnesota	2
Missouri	2
Nebraska	2
New York	1
North Carolina	3
Ohio	5
Oregon	1
Pennsylvania	3
South Carolina	2
Tennessee	1
Virginia	28
Washington	4
Wisconsin	2
I do not reside in the United States	1
Total	85

Q4 | What is your position?

Answer	Percentage	Number
County, city, town manager	65.3%	62
Assistant or deputy manager	12.6%	12
Department head	4.2%	4
Elected official	6.3%	6
Other (please specify)	11.6%	11
Total	100%	95

Q5 | A strategic plan is defined as a plan that is adopted by the governing body and includes a mission, vision, values or value statement and goals and objectives for the organization and community. Does your local government have a strategic plan?

Answer	Percentage	Number
Yes	49.6%	55
No	21.6%	24
We are in the process of developing a strategic plan.	10.8%	12
We have some components of a strategic plan but not all as defined above.	18.0%	20
Total	100%	111*

* Some respondents answered only this question and did not complete the full survey.

The following questions were answered by local government officials stating they had a strategic plan.

Q6 | What do you view as the benefits of having a strategic plan for the organization and the community?

Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
The strategic plan provides clear guidance on the goals of the governing body to the manager.	5.7%	0.0%	2.9%	20.0%	71.4%	35
The strategic plan is used as a communication device for staff.	5.7%	2.9%	2.9%	25.7%	62.9%	35
The strategic plan helps me to prioritize the work in the organization.	5.7%	2.9%	8.6%	28.6%	54.3%	35
The strategic plan communicates to employees that what they do is important and for a purpose.	5.9%	5.9%	14.7%	20.6%	52.9%	34
The strategic plan is used to prioritize budget requests.	8.8%	2.9%	8.8%	29.4%	50.0%	34
The strategic plans serves as an accountability tool for the governing body during the manager's evaluation.	6.1%	12.1%	24.2%	21.2%	36.4%	33
The strategic plan serves as a communication device for the citizens in the community on the goals of the governing body.	5.9%	2.9%	11.8%	38.2%	41.2%	34
The strategic plans helps me, as the manager, prioritize staff and financial resources.	5.9%	2.9%	5.9%	29.4%	55.9%	34
The strategic plan prioritizes resources from a organizational-wide perspective.	5.9%	2.9%	14.7%	41.2%	35.3%	34

Q7 | The strategic plan is a resource for local governments during times of crisis. Consider the following questions and select your level of agreement.

Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
The strategic plan helped prioritize services during the COVID-19 pandemic.	20.6%	11.8%	41.2%	20.6%	5.9%	34
The strategic plan helped to prioritize funding when revenues declined during the pandemic.	23.5%	8.8%	29.4%	26.5%	11.8%	34
The strategic plan is helping to prioritize funding allocation through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).	23.5%	2.9%	32.4%	23.5%	17.7%	34
The strategic plan has helped prioritize resources during economic crisis.	20.6%	5.9%	26.5%	26.5%	20.6%	34
The strategic plan has helped the elected officials make decisions on controversial issues.	11.8%	8.8%	23.5%	26.5%	29.4%	34
The strategic plan has helped prioritize resources as a result of a natural disaster in our community.	17.1%	17.1%	37.1%	20.0%	8.6%	35

Q8 | How often does the governing body update or review the strategic plan?

Answer	Percentage	Number
Annually	25.7%	9
Every two years	31.4%	11
With each election	8.6%	3
Other	34.3%	12
Total	100%	35

Q9 | At what stage of the strategic planning process is your local government?

Answer	Percentage	Number
Strategic plan is adopted and available.	45.7%	16
Strategic plan is completed and available and the budget is tied to strategic priorities.	40.0%	14
Strategic plan is completed, we appropriate funds for strategic priorities and we have developed performance measures to track strategic goals and priorities.	14.3%	5
Total	100%	35

Q10 | Was your strategic plan developed with in-house staff or with an outside facilitator?

Answer	Percentage	Number
In-house staff	42.9%	15
Outside facilitator	57.1%	20
Total	100%	35

Q11 | Did you conduct any citizen engagement (surveys, town hall meetings, emails) to gather citizen input on the mission, vision or goals for the local government during the strategic planning process?

Answer	Percentage	Number
Yes, we gathered citizen input	60.0%	21
No, we did not gather citizen input	40.0%	14
Total	100%	35

Q12 | If you did not conduct any citizen engagement to inform the strategic plan process, identify the reasons below. (select all that apply)

Answer	Percentage	Number
In a small local government, citizen engagement happens daily.	85.7%	12
Our elected officials work closely with citizens because we are small and can communicate their needs sufficiently.	78.6%	11
Not enough time.	28.6%	4
We did not have staff resources to conduct citizen engagement.	64.3%	9
Other	21.4%	3
Total		14

The following questions were answered by local government officials who stated they did not have a strategic plan at all. Not all questions were displayed to each official depending on their answers to previous questions.

Q13 | What are some challenges for your local government to developing a strategic plan?

Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
Elected officials are not interested in developing a strategic plan.	16.7%	11.1%	33.3%	33.3%	5.6%	18
We do not have the time to do a strategic plan.	11.1%	11.1%	33.3%	33.3%	11.1%	18
We do not have the staff expertise to do a strategic plan.	17.7%	17.7%	23.5%	17.7%	23.5%	17
We do not have funding available for a strategic planning process.	11.8%	11.7%	11.8%	29.4%	35.3%	17
We feel the comprehensive plan is sufficient for strategic planning.	17.7%	29.4%	29.4%	17.7%	5.9%	17
We use a priority setting process during the budget process in lieu of a strategic plan.	5.9%	5.9%	29.4%	52.9%	5.9%	17
The elected officials cannot agree to do a strategic planning process.	27.8%	11.1%	33.3%	16.7%	11.1%	18

Q14 | If you wanted to do a strategic plan, what resources would you need?
(select all that apply)

Answer	Percentage	Number
Financial resources - money to do it.	38.9%	7
Staff resources - staff to help pull the document together.	44.4%	8
Time resources - dedicated time outside the office to hold a strategic planning workshop.	61.1%	11
Elected officials buy-in - having the elected officials agree to hold a strategic planning workshop.	50.0%	9
Outside facilitator - someone neutral to facilitate the process.	50.0%	9
Other	0.0%	0
Total		18

This section was completed by local government officials who identified having some components of a strategic plan or were in the process of developing a strategic plan. Not all questions were displayed to each official depending on their answers to previous questions.

Q15 | At what stage of the strategic planning process is your local government?

Answer	Percentage	Number
Strategic planning process has been initiated but not complete. (Please note in the box what activities have been initiated.)	42.9%	3
We have some components of the strategic plan but not all. (Please note in the box below what components are available.)	28.6%	2
The governing body has not adopted the strategic plan at this time, but they held a strategic planning retreat.	28.6%	2
Total	100%	7

Q16 | What are some challenges for your local government to developing a strategic plan?

Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
Elected officials are not interested in developing a strategic plan.	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3
We do not have the time to do a strategic plan.	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	3
We do not have the staff expertise to do a strategic plan.	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	3
We do not have funding available for a strategic planning process.	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	2
We feel the comprehensive plan is sufficient for strategic planning.	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	3
We use a priority setting process during the budget process in lieu of a strategic plan.	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	3
The elected officials cannot agree to do a strategic planning process.	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	3

Q17 | Will your strategic plan be developed with in-house staff or with an outside facilitator?

Answer	Percentage	Number
In-house staff	20.0%	1
Outside facilitator	80.0%	4
Total	100%	5

Q18 | Will you conduct any citizen engagement (surveys, town hall meetings, emails) to gather citizen input on the mission, vision or goals for the local government during the strategic planning process?

Answer	Percentage	Number
Yes, we will (or we did) gather citizen input	60.0%	3
No, we will (or we did) not gather citizen input	40.0%	2
Total	100%	5

Q19 | If you will not (or did not) conduct any citizen engagement to inform the strategic plan process, identify the reasons below. (select all that apply)

Answer	Percentage	Number
In a small local government, citizen engagement happens daily.	50.0%	1
Our elected officials work closely with citizens because we are small and can communicate their needs sufficiently.	50.0%	1
Not enough time.	100.0%	2
We will not have staff resources to conduct citizen engagement.	50.0%	1
Other	100.0%	2
Total		2

Q20 | Why did your local government engage in the strategic planning process?

Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
The strategic plan will provide clear guidance on the goals of the governing body to the manager.	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	4
The strategic plan will help the manager to prioritize the work in the organization.	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	25.0%	4
The strategic plan will communicate to employees that what they do is important and for a purpose.	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	4
The strategic plan will be used to prioritize budget requests.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	75.0%	25.0%	4
The strategic plans will serve as an accountability tool for the governing body during the manager's evaluation.	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	4
The strategic plan will help to prioritize staff and financial resources.	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	40.0%	5
The pandemic has changed what we do and how we do it.	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%	60.0%	0.0%	5
We had an election and new members were elected to the governing body.	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	40.0%	20.0%	5
The governing body has differing views on the overall direction of the local government.	20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	5
We needed an overall plan for American Rescue Plan Spending (ARPA funding)	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	4
We are in a financial crisis.	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	4
We need consensus from the governing body on controversial issues.	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	3

Q21 | What components of the strategic plan do you currently have? (select all that apply)

Answer	Percentage	Number
Mission Statement	15.4%	2
Vision Statement	30.8%	4
Values or values statement	30.8%	4
Goals	76.9%	10
Objectives	61.5%	8
Other (please describe)	15.4%	2
Total		13

Q22 | Many small communities use other resources or documents to serve as the local government's strategic plan. What type of document or resource serves as your local government's strategic plan? (select all that apply)

Answer	Percentage	Number
Comprehensive Plan (20 year plan of land use)	69.2%	9
Budget	84.6%	11
Capital Improvement Plan	46.2%	6
Other Plan (please specify)	7.7%	1
Total		13

Q23 | Were the components of your strategic plan developed in-house or using an outside facilitator?

Answer	Percentage	Number
In-house staff	53.9%	7
Outside facilitator	46.1%	6
Total	100%	13

Q24 | Were the components of your strategic plan developed with citizen engagement?

Answer	Percentage	Number
Yes	30.8%	4
No	69.2%	9
Total	100%	13

Q25 | If you did not conduct any citizen engagement to inform the strategic plan components, identify the reasons below. (select all that apply)

Answer	Percentage	Number
In a small local government, citizen engagement happens daily.	44.4%	4
Our elected officials work closely with citizens because we are small and can communicate their needs sufficiently.	33.3%	3
Not enough time.	11.1%	1
We will not have staff resources to conduct citizen engagement.	11.1%	1
It is an internal document for the governing body and the manager.	22.2%	2
Other	44.4%	4
Total		9

Q26 | Why did your local government engage in some level of the strategic planning process? (strategic plan includes components of the plan)

Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
The strategic plan will provide clear guidance on the goals of the governing body to the manager.	0.0%	7.7%	7.7%	69.2%	15.4%	13
The strategic plan will help the manager to prioritize the work in the organization.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	69.2%	30.8%	13
The strategic plan will communicate to employees that what they do is important and for a purpose.	0.0%	7.7%	15.4%	53.8%	23.1%	13
The strategic plan will be used to prioritize budget requests.	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	53.8%	38.5%	13
The strategic plans will serve as an accountability tool for the governing body during the manager's evaluation.	0.0%	23.1%	23.1%	53.8%	0.0%	13
The strategic plan will help to prioritize staff and financial resources.	0.0%	0.0%	15.4%	61.5%	23.1%	13
The pandemic has changed what we do and how we do it.	15.4%	7.7%	61.5%	15.4%	0.0%	13
We had an election and new members were elected to the governing body.	15.4%	15.4%	38.5%	23.1%	7.7%	13
The governing body has differing views on the overall direction of the local government.	23.1%	7.7%	15.4%	30.8%	23.1%	13
We needed an overall plan for American Rescue Plan Spending (ARPA funding)	15.4%	7.7%	53.8%	15.4%	7.7%	13
We are in a financial crisis.	46.1%	30.8%	15.4%	7.7%	0.0%	13
We need consensus from the governing body on controversial issues.	15.4%	23.1%	30.8%	15.4%	15.4%	13

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