Strategic Planning

(Adapted from the Strengthening Extension Advisory Leadership 2003 Curriculum)

Objectives
✓ Define strategic planning
✓ Understand differences between inside-out and outside-in strategic planning
✓ Learn common techniques for setting priorities: brainstorming, 100 votes, multivoting, and nominal group technique.

Advance preparation
✓ Review the material provided (about 2 hours)

Materials needed
✓ Computer and projector
✓ CD with PowerPoint presentation
✓ Role Play Assignment (Attachment 1)
✓ 100 votes (Attachment 2)
✓ Multivoting (Attachment 3)
✓ Flip charts
✓ Markers
✓ Voting dots (stickers)
✓ Pens and pencils

Time needed
✓ 1 hour

Background
A major role of community leaders is to guide others in identifying the most important needs to be addressed in a community. This is typically done by a process called strategic planning. Strategic planning is used to determine the mission, values and goals of an organization, as well as the objectives that will help a group reach its goals, the roles and responsibilities of those involved, and timelines for completing goals. Quite simply, strategic planning is a management tool.

There are common techniques for helping groups determine their priorities as a part of the strategic planning process. Brainstorming is the foundation technique; it is a way for groups to generate lots of ideas in a short period of time and it encourages creativity. Then, techniques such as 100 votes, multivoting, and nominal group technique can be used to narrow the ideas to manageable numbers so that groups can seek additional information before making final decisions or choices.

Interest approach — To be completed at the end of the lesson.
(slide 21, Attachment 1)

Using what you just learned about strategic planning, work through the situation described on Attachment 1 by using
• brainstorming
• nominal group technique
• 100 votes
• multivoting
Lesson

1. The first four slides introduce the concept of strategic planning, explain why it is important, and give an overview of the process (slides 1-4).

2. The differences between inside-out planning and outside-in planning are important to understand (Kaufman and Herman, 1991) (slides 5-8). This is an important concept for Texas Cooperative Extension and all organizations (such as county governments, school districts, and businesses such as banks and insurance companies) that are subject to both internal and external accountability measures.

   Inside-out planning focuses on the organization as the primary client. It allows a group to look from within the organization outside to the operational world. Inside-out planning usually focuses on the mission, goals and purposes of the organization. It is concerned with what is good for the organization and is typically reactive in nature (slide 6).

   *Example:* In Texas Cooperative Extension, a group of employees might evaluate the current situation within the agency, discuss priorities, and make recommendations for the agency as a whole.

   Outside-in planning focuses on society as the primary client. It looks into the organization from the outside. It may challenge the status quo and sometimes cause discomfort to current employees by suggesting change. Outside-in planning is typically proactive in nature (slide 7).

   *Example:* In Texas Cooperative Extension, external groups help set priorities for the agency through the Texas Community Futures Forum (TCFF) process. People from outside the agency help identify issues the agency should address and provide future direction for the agency.

   The key to effective strategic planning is integrating both the outside-in approach and inside-out approach (slides 9 and 10). It is best to use the outside-in approach first to get a global perspective. Then, the planners use the inside-out approach to consider “what is” vs. “what should be.” This allows an organization to take the strengths of both methods and adopt the most effective strategy.

3. There are various strategies groups can use to generate ideas and then prioritize needs, issues and ideas (slides 11-20).

   **Brainstorming.** The most frequently used technique for group decision-making is **Brainstorming.** It is the foundation for many other techniques and the basis for creative problem-solving. In brainstorming, people in the group freely exchange ideas and generate lists in response to an open-ended question. An example of a question that might be used in brainstorming is, “What are possible ways we might raise money to support the 4-H awards program?” Participants try to generate as many ideas as possible, often building or piggybacking on a comment or idea from another participant. This supports creativity and leads to expanded possibilities. This is a fast way of getting ideas on the table (or flip chart) in a short period of time. It is best to use brainstorming when: 1) you want to generate a large number of ideas or gather a lot of information for decision-making, priority setting or planning; 2) you want all participants to contribute freely; and 3) you want to inspire creativity.
Guidelines for conducting the brainstorming activity (Osborn, 1963):

a. **Clearly frame an open-ended question.** Write a question that will generate a lot of ideas. Make sure participants understand the question being addressed and the purpose and background of the activity.

For example: “The 4-H program needs $1,500 to purchase ribbons, pins, trophies, etc., and to cover the costs of other expenses associated with their awards program. Tonight we are going to explore possible fund-raising activities we might conduct to raise this money. **What are your ideas for ways we might raise money to support the 4-H awards program?”**

b. **Do not censure or make judgments about any ideas.** Before they begin, tell the group that all ideas are welcome, even those that might seem outlandish or off-the-wall. These ideas often stimulate the best contributions from the group. The major no-no in brainstorming is making judgments about ideas as they are offered. Such comments as “That won’t work” or “We tried that 5 years ago and lost money” will stifle creativity and discourage participation.

c. **List all ideas on a flip chart.** Make sure all participants can see the ideas listed. List them as rapidly as possible. Encourage participants to call out ideas without being called upon. Write down every idea, no matter how wild or ridiculous.

d. **Encourage hitchhiking.** Tell participants to build on other ideas that are suggested. Hitchhiking often results in the best ideas. Think outside the box and draw ideas from literature, science, or yesterday’s breakfast. Connect ideas that are seemingly unrelated.

e. **Focus on quantity.** The more ideas the better the chance of generating creative, workable ones. Go to a new sheet of flip chart paper before the page is completely full. A full page indicates the end of the task and stifles contributions.

f. **Stay loose.** Don’t force people to contribute. A free and open environment supports creativity and leads to the best outcome.

g. **The best comes last.** Often the best, most creative ideas come at the end of the brainstorming session. After an initial burst of ideas there may be a time of silence. Allow the group to be silent for a moment. Usually more ideas will begin flowing and this will generate the eventual solution to the question.

Nominal group technique. All groups find that much of their responsibility involves exploring various options and issues and making decisions that provide direction for the organization. In order to generate ideas, understand each option and the impact it would have, make choices and set priorities, a group must have a skilled leader. The nominal group technique is an effective way to make pooled judgments or decisions in groups that meet face-to-face.

This technique is very effective in generating lots of creative, new ideas and allowing every member of the group to express ideas with minimal influence from other participants. Use this technique when you want to identify priorities or select a few alternatives for further examination.
Guidelines for conducting the nominal group technique activity
(Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson, 1975):

a. **Provide tables where participants can sit.** Have participants sit where they can write; make sure they have paper and pencils.

b. **Develop the focus question.** Write the question as an issue statement that defines the issue in general but does not offer solutions. Tell participants there are lots of alternatives and no one right answer. Write the question on the flip chart so all group members can see it.

c. **Silently brainstorm ideas.** Give participants 5 to 10 minutes to write down all their responses.

d. **Conduct a round-robin sharing of ideas.** Each person shares one idea at a time in a round-robin format until all ideas have been listed on the flip chart. Encourage “hitchhiking” of ideas even if they were not written down. Don’t combine similar ideas at this time—list each separately.

e. **Discuss and clarify all ideas on the flip chart.** Discuss each idea fully. Encourage participants to share their thoughts, both pro and con. Everyone in the group should be clear on the meaning of each item. Ask those who contributed ideas to explain them more fully if necessary. If the contributors agree that some ideas are the same, delete duplication. However, do not combine two or more ideas into one at this time. Number each idea.

f. **Rank alternatives.** Ask each group member to silently and independently rank their top ten alternatives, with ten being the most important. This may be done by having participants write the rank beside the idea directly on the flip chart or by listing each idea on a 3-inch x 5-inch index card and writing their rank on the bottom right corner of the card. The facilitator collects the cards and records each ranking beside the alternative. This ensures that rankings are anonymous. The ranks for each alternative are then averaged.

   **NOTE:** When dealing with a large number of items, it may be necessary to narrow the list by using the multivoting or 100 votes procedures before ranking them.

g. **Discuss ranked items.** All items receiving a rank are listed so all participants can see them. The ranking of each item is designated. (The higher the total, the higher the rank.) The facilitator leads further discussion and clarification of the ranked items to ensure that all participants understand what is meant by each item.

h. **Items are ranked a second time.** From among the ranked items on the previous list, each participant ranks the ten items he now considers most important. This is done silently and independently. (This ranking might be limited to five items per person.) The rankings are again averaged.

i. **Discuss final rankings.** The group reviews the ranking and discusses the outcome of the activity.

j. **Format the results.** Create a table listing all ranked items, beginning with the item ranked the highest. Include columns for the total votes each item received and the number of persons casting a vote for each item.
100 votes and multivoting. Both 100 votes and multivoting are ways for groups to prioritize needs and ideas (Attachments 2 and 3).

Application
To be a leader, you must be able to think futuristically and be an agent of change. Strategic planning is a way to do this systematically. These activities allow clients to be involved in the change process. Involving others is an essential element of leadership.

References