

January 2021
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Parthenon Model Strategic Plan

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A strategic plan guides the board, communicates value to members and empowers the staff. Most have 3 to 6 goals.

The dilemma is whether to include anything about the infrastructure in the plan. Infrastructure is internal, focused on governance and management. It would include technology investment, leadership pipeline, professional staffing, and financial resources.

Without infrastructure the other goals cannot be advanced.

Quandary

Some boards believe members are only interested in goals that communicate value. "They don't care that we have a leadership pipeline and money in the bank."

Other boards believe the community should know about the strengths of the organization. "We were founded 50 years ago; members should know about our structure and leadership as a part of the strategic plan."

To include or not?

When it is included, it is often the last goal in the plan, purposely. The goals are intended to deliver value to the membership, for instance Professional Development, Community Outreach and Governmental Relations.

The infrastructure goal might be titled Organizational Excellence, World Class Organization, or Sustainability.

While the board may not insert structure and resources into the plan, it is important that directors realize their responsibility for oversight. For instance, the need to upgrade technology may necessitate multiyear funding. Creating a pipeline of future leaders will require initiatives.

Parthenon

Most groups include an infrastructure in their retreat discussions. But when communicating the strategic plan to members, they focus on the deliverable, value-added goals, leaving the infrastructure invisible or silent.

Others include it so members know the strengths and structure of a well-established organization.

Another approach is to promote only the goals, also called pillars of the organization. Then promote the infrastructure distinctly.

Imagine the Greek Parthenon. The pillars represent the goals and priorities. They sit upon a solid base that demonstrates the infrastructure necessary to advance the goals.



“By positioning the organizational infrastructure as the foundation upon which other goals are built, leadership clearly sees and better understands its importance,” said Chris Hart IV, CEO at the Florida Court Clerks & Comptrollers.

Membership

Another quandary is whether membership is a goal or an outcome.

Associations and chambers rely heavily on recruitment and retention. The board may feel it is important to include a goal titled, “Membership Growth” or “Member Participation.”

However, those reading the strategic plan will judge its relevance and return on investment. Growing the membership may not resonate as ROI.

Position membership as an outcome. If the organization achieves its mission and goals, it will draw members without having to state it in the plan.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.