From Vision to Action: Building a Strategic Plan for Your Early Learning Program

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HERE ARE THE CORE QUESTIONS YOU'LL ANSWER WITH YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Where are we now?
Where do we want to be?
How do we get there?

What are your burning fires?



Without a solid plan, your program risks:

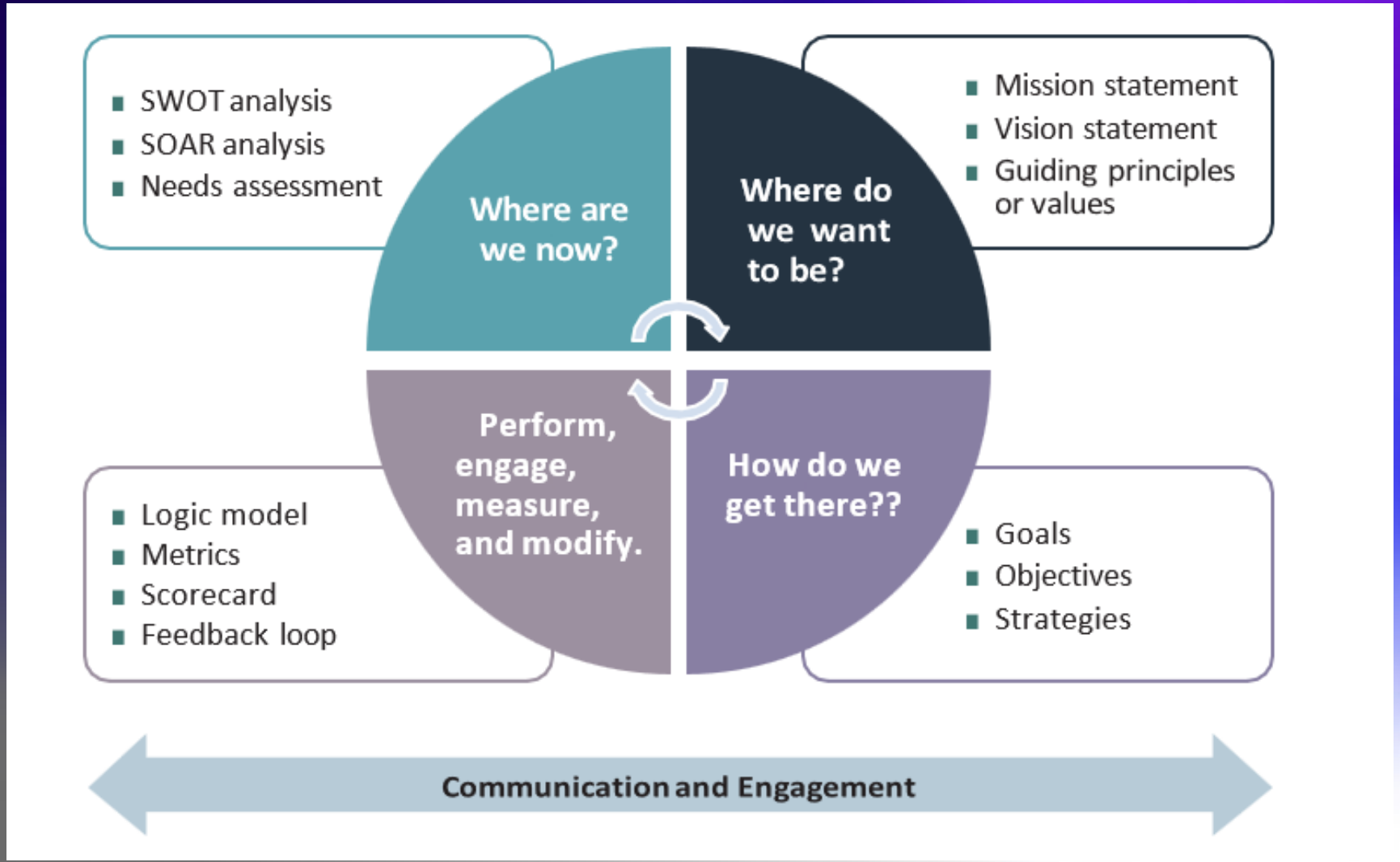
❌ **Lack of Direction – You may not know what to focus on.**

❌ **Inefficient Resource Allocation – Time and money may be spent on low-impact activities.**

❌ **Poor Decision-Making – You may react to challenges instead of proactively addressing them.**

❌ **Missed Opportunities – Growth potential may go untapped.**

CORE ELEMENTS OF STRATEGIC PLAN AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION



YOU ARE NOT ALONE: STRATEGIC PLANNING INVOLVES A TEAM

You'll need:

- A planning team--individuals who bring diverse skills and perspectives that will be crucial for a comprehensive strategy
- A kickoff meeting to bring the planning team together and ensure a shared understanding of the work ahead
- A timeline for the completion of the plan
- A communications plan to share out the plan once it is done
- A timeline for tracking how you are doing in implementing the plan with opportunities to assess how it is going and revise as needed

Building the foundation: Vision, Mission, and Values

THE VISION IS THE DREAM, THE MISSION IS THE DAILY WORK, VALUES ARE THE GROUND RULES.

Thinking about your program as a house:

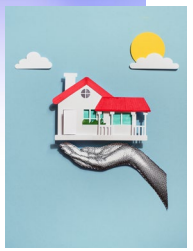
What is the vision– what is the view outside?

What is the mission- what is going on inside the house?

What are the values- what is your unbreakable foundation?



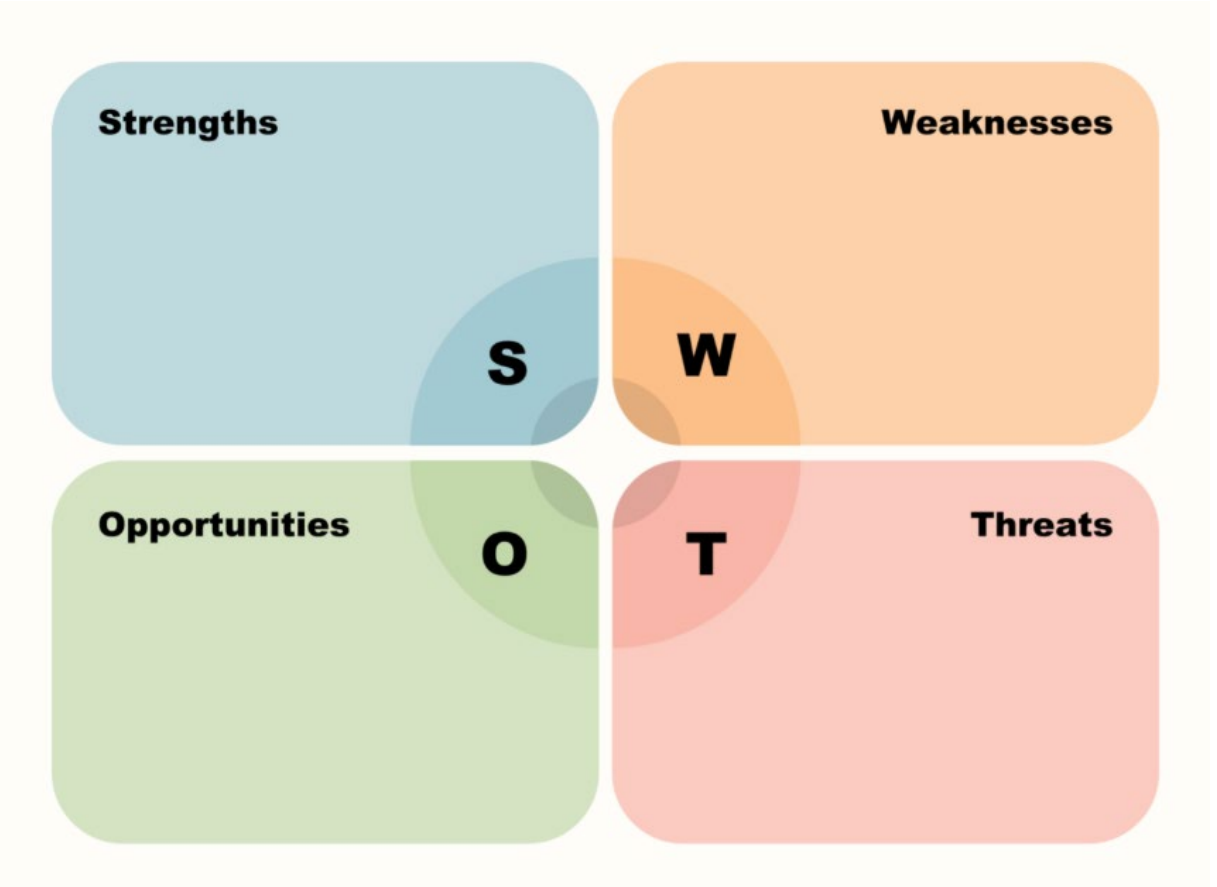




Where are we now?

SWOT & SOAR

SWOT Analysis



SOAR Analysis

S

O

A

R

Strengths: What can we build on?

- What are we most proud of as an organization?
- What makes us unique?
- What is our proudest achievement in the last year or two?
- How do we use our strengths to get results?
- How do our strengths fit with the realities of the marketplace?
- What do we do or provide that is world class for our customers, our industry, and other potential stakeholders?

Aspirations: What do we care deeply about?

- When we explore our values and aspirations, *"what are we deeply passionate about?"*
- Reflecting on our Strengths and Opportunities conversations, who are we, who should we become, and where should we go in the future?
- What is our most compelling aspiration?
- What strategic initiatives (projects, programs and processes) would support our aspirations?

Opportunities: What are our stakeholders asking for?

- How do we make sense of the opportunities provided by the external forces and trends?
- What are the topic three opportunities on which we should focus our efforts?
- How can we best meet the needs of our stakeholders?
- Who are possible new customers?
- How can we distinctly differentiate ourselves from existing or potential competitors?
- What are the possible new markets, products, services or processes?
- How can we reframe challenges to be seen as exciting opportunities?
- What new skills do we need to move forward?

Results: How do we know we are succeeding?

- Considering our Strengths, Opportunities, and Aspirations, what meaningful measures would indicate that we are on track to achieving our goals?
- What are 3 to 5 indicators that would create a scorecard that addresses a triple bottom line of profit, people, and planet?
- What resources are needed to implement vital projects?
- What are the best rewards to support those who achieve our goals?

Behind the SWOT or SOAR is information gathering

Collect qualitative information and quantitative information for your SWOT or SOAR

Qualitative information- interviews, focus groups, surveys- gathered from key stakeholders: staff, board members, families, peers, advocates, policymakers

Quantitative information- your financials, population demographics, etc.

Example: Stakeholder Survey for a Child Care Strategic Plan- Focus on STRENGTHS

The following is an excerpt from our recent Stakeholder Survey results affirming the value and contribution of DHCDC to those we serve:

1. The teachers are passionate about their role in educating young, impressionable minds.

2. DHCDC provides loving care coupled with nationally accredited educational programs to mostly needy children in our community via a sliding tuition scale.

3. Provides a safe, nurturing, affordable, high-quality childcare experience to children and their families.

4. Board communications: there has not been a time where I don't know what's going on. I think clear communication is key to our success.

5. Hiring and maintaining a great staff.

6. The kids are exposed to a wider variety of experiences and learning opportunities than they might receive in other daycares or even at home.

7. Reaching out to people personally with appreciation.

8. *Educates children from small babies and toddlers to 5-year-olds ready for kindergarten.*

9. *DHCDC does an excellent job of being aware of and meeting needs of individual children and families facing unique challenges. Every effort is made to figure out how to assist the student and the family.*

10. Parents seem very satisfied with the care their children are receiving.

Example: Where are we now information informs the future

- Strategic Focus Areas: Based on the themes derived from data and stakeholder input, there are four areas that are the focus of planning efforts.

How do we get there?

Goals, Objectives and Strategies

You have figured out where you are and where you want to be!

Goals, objectives, and strategies are your roadmap to get there.

- **Make your plan actionable.** To have any chance for successful implementation, the plan must clearly articulate goals, action steps, responsibilities, accountabilities, and specific deadlines. All partners must understand the plan and their individual roles.
- **Test assumptions.** Identify your key assumptions and then step back and think about whether they are consistent with your current situation. Are there data to support or disprove your assumptions? Are your assumptions relevant? Are they based on logic?

Goals, Objectives and Strategies



Goals. These are statements that convey what an organization wants to achieve. They answer the question of what you must focus on to achieve your vision.

Objectives. Objectives are more specific than a goal and may be either qualitative or quantitative, and they must be met to reach your goal.

Strategies. These items convert the objectives into specific actionable steps. Strategies outline the “what, when, and who” of specific actions, and they are measurable. Within your operational or action plan, the ownership for these strategies will be defined along with additional details and tasks to accomplish the strategy.

Consider use of SMART



Child care center strategic plan excerpt: goal, objective, strategies, timeline

Strategic Focus Area 1

Organizational Infrastructure

GOAL

Child Start employees and teams are supported to serve the community well and to develop career and leadership skills to take Child Start into the future.

OBJECTIVES

- Child Start is fully staffed with talented, dedicated employees who reflect the community they serve.
- Child Start provides its employees with individualized professional development and growth opportunities.

Excerpt (continued)

1.2. Research and analyze barriers and opportunities for staff recruitment and retention.
[Timeline: October 2020 – June 2021]

- **1.2.1.** Identify positions and areas that experience high burnout.
- **1.2.2.** Review hiring process – examine where Child Start recruits, what questions Child Start asks in interviews, etc.
- **1.2.3.** Develop opportunities for increased employee recognition.
- **1.2.4.** Clarify what types of employees Child Start is seeking.
- **1.2.5.** Clarify how Child Start can best advertise career opportunities.
- **1.2.6.** Construct position descriptions that will attract the type of employees Child Start is seeking.
- **1.2.7.** Explore technological solutions to paperwork and record-keeping challenges.
- **1.2.8.** Implement selected technological solutions to paperwork and record-keeping challenges.

1.3. Create an overall staff development and training plan.
[Timeline: October 2020 – May 2021 and Ongoing]

- **1.3.1.** Develop Individual Development Plan's (IDPs) for all staff. Make sure they include easily measurable/achievable goals, the employee's career aspirations, in addition to widely-shared training needs that drive inservice/pre-service plans. Make sure IDPs are revisited semi-annually, and are separate from employee "rating."
- **1.3.2.** Develop supervisors' skills, including Reflective Supervision, to support employees by identifying employee strengths, support employee interests, etc.
- **1.3.3.** Use results from monitoring (of quality, fidelity, etc.) to drive professional development opportunities for staff in-service or pre-service.
- **1.3.4.** Revisit the training scheduling process and update it to ensure that the

1.2. Champions: HR Recruitment Specialist/Data Processing Specialist

How will we know if we are successful?

Define what success means.

- **Be concrete and make it measurable!**
- **You can use a logic model, key performance indicators, a SMART approach, a scorecard!**

Use the plan.

- **Make your plan a living document.** Good strategic plans are fluid and organic, not rigid and unbending. They allow you to adapt to emerging opportunities and challenges. Don’t be afraid to change your plan as necessary.
- **Make strategy a habit, not just a retreat.** Review the strategic plan for performance achievement no less than quarterly and as often as monthly or weekly. Focus on accountability for results and have clear and compelling consequences for missed deadlines.
- **Plan to sustain your work.** Create an ongoing process for decisionmaking regarding what, why, and how to sustain your work. Doing so will ensure that the policy, initiatives, and programs connected with your strategic plan are continuously improved, adapted, or discontinued in accordance with intended outcomes and goals. Sustainability should be part of the strategic plan.

Child Care Center Success Measures Example

- **Key Area**: **FINANCIAL STABILITY**
- **Goal #1:** We will increase non-tuition revenue for the next five years to enable the following:
- • Increase teacher salaries toward fair market value.
- • Hire two teachers and two assistants to staff two unused classrooms.
- • Establish reserve funds: Operation, Capital, and Emergency.

Child Care Center Success Measures Example (cont)

- **Strategies to reach the goal:**
- 1. Establish two donor levels (Honor Roll and Sustaining). i. *Completed by 2018*
- 2. Increase the number of individual donors and donations. a. Contact current donors to increase donation level to next step. *a. Ongoing*
- b. Identify individuals with potential for high-level donations. *a. Ongoing*
- c. Engage DHCDC Board members and Community Stakeholders to help identify/contact donors throughout year. *a. Ongoing*
- d. Grow fundraiser events (i.e., annual Breakfast and annual Art Auction). *a. Completed and ongoing. Annual Art Auction became Golden Hour event*

ETC.

Child Care Center Success Measures Example (cont)

- **Success Criteria: We will be successful if we achieve the following:**
- • Increase teacher salaries toward fair market value. ○ *Ongoing. Teachers received raises with the exception of FY21 as a result of the pandemic.*
- • Hire two teachers and two assistants to staff two unused classrooms. ○ *All classrooms utilized with the exception of the 2020-2021 school because the VPI class was not held as a result of the pandemic.*
- • No increase in sliding scale tuition. *o Sliding scale tuition has remained the same.*
- • Establish reserve funds: Operation, Capital, and Emergency. ◦ *Ongoing. DHCDC currently has seven months of reserve funding.*
- ● By June 30,2021, Breakfast sponsors will be increased by 15.
- ● By June 30, 2022, Breakfast and Golden Hour sponsors will be increased by 15.
- ● By June 30, 2021, successfully acquire grant funding from two new sources.
- ● By June 30, 2022, successfully acquire grant funding from five new sources.

Wrap Up

Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.

If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else. (Yogi Berra)

When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it. (Henry Ford)

Innovation is the ability to see change as an opportunity – not a threat. (Steve Jobs)

You can’t use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have. (Maya Angelou)