



Stage 3: Options and Choices

Now to the heart of strategic planning. You need to agree on 5 or 6 priority issues (from the previous SWOT and PESTLE exercises) and strategies for dealing with these issues. This can be a difficult exercise, because there may be several options and the organisation may have to make some hard choices. The process may well include deciding not to do something or not to provide a particular service.

Once you have agreed on the main priorities for your organisation, discuss and clarify the various ways you can address these key issues. It is important to be both creative and realistic when thinking about your options. Make sure you keep in mind the limits of your organisation:

- How much space do you have?
- Staff time, skills and capacity
- Resource limits e.g. IT capabilities
- Legal and constitutional limits
- Financial limits.

Of course, even if you have limitations, you may identify ways to expand these limits e.g. find new office space, apply to increase funds.

Another useful tool is **scenario planning** – this can assist with deciding on the strategies you need to achieve your objectives.

This involves identifying a number of scenarios or 'what ifs'. For example:

What if the funding over the next year is reduced by 30%? What strategies or responses will your organisation implement to meet this challenge?

The government announces a new funding programme for your community with new criteria that is currently outside your constitution but this is the only 'new money' available. What strategies or responses will your organisation make to take advantage of this potential opportunity?

Assessing your options

Once you have a list of options that you would like to explore further, agree a set of criteria against which you can assess whether the identified option is to stay in your top list of 5 or 6. The criteria help you decide what stays in your strategic plan and what is not possible for you to achieve.

Examples of criteria are:

- Evidence of need
- Does it meet your mission statement?
- Do you have the necessary capacity and skills?
- Is sustainable funding available?
- Who else provides the service?
- Does your priority reflect those of key funders, local/regional/national government, partner organisations, other people who have an influence on your organisation?

By asking these questions about each of the options you have come up with, this should ensure your strategic plan is realistic.