

## **From SWOT to Strategic Priorities: A Short Primer**

There are many ways to update strategies for organizations. The starting point is usually the organization's Mission and Vision. Make sure they are up to date and aligned with current circumstances.

### **Scanning the Operating Environment**

Next, it is important to fully understand the operating environment. This can be done through customer and employee satisfaction surveys, peer interviews, or by other means. A shorthand process called SWOT is a quick, time-efficient method to help an organization understand its operating environment. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. In a brain-storming session of just a few hours, a facilitator can lead a board and invitees through discussions in each of these areas. Once the ideas have been brain-stormed, then meeting participants can group them into priority areas.

### **Strategic Priorities and Objectives: What Are They?**

Strategic priorities will become the major goals for the coming three years. They should be organization-wide goals designed to achieve a group focus on the most critical issues. These are the most important areas for the organization to address during this period.

Potential strategic priorities may cover the following areas:

- Program related.
- Organizational health
- Fundraising/fiscal health
- Facilities and physical infrastructure

An organization should have no more than 3 to 6 strategic priorities, otherwise the priorities will exceed the organization's grasp. As strategic priorities are addressed, the organization may revisit the strategic plan and add additional ones.

Strategic priorities are derived from the SWOT Analysis and should address the primary weaknesses and opportunities identified in the analysis.

**Objectives** – Objectives are specific measurable steps toward a strategic priority. Each strategic priority will be supported by specific objectives that result in progress toward the strategic priority.

Objectives should be "SMART" – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Determined.