Strategic Planning and Organizational Change in Interpretation: Adapting to a Rapidly Changing World

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Abstract
Have you thought about a strategic plan for your program or department? Do you want to enlist the support of executive management for your priorities and to address significant changes, current and future, in your internal and external work environment? The focus of this workshop is on what a strategic plan is, what it is not, how it differs from an interpretive or master plan and why you should consider doing one. Today’s rapidly changing nonprofit and public sector world requires new strategic planning tools and customized strategies to engage all levels of employees and stakeholders to keep up with the unexpected, as well as the expected, trends and events that shape the work environment. Strategic planning processes in different agency and nonprofit organizations will be reviewed for lessons learned.

Keywords
Strategic planning, interpretive planning, planning toolbox, funding, organizational survival, organizational culture analysis, workplace change.

Introduction
This workshop is designed for the employee or manager at any level who aspires to be a positive “change agent” in their current job or future career development. The focus will be both personal and organizational relative to the strategic planning process. Participants will explore the fundamentals of effective leadership in strategic planning and how personal leadership styles determine the approach to positive engagement within the organization or agency regardless of your status or job position.

Rick Parmer and Brad Morrison have over 50 years of combined experience in interpretive programming, management and organizational development in the private, nonprofit, and public sectors. They have worked together on strategic planning projects in public agencies over the past decade in respective management and consulting roles. Both have been in leadership and coaching positions with nonprofit, private and government agencies as well as served in teaching and training capacities including courses at colleges and universities.

By the end of the session the participant will:
1) Understand what a strategic plan is and why it is a creative and customized process with specific outcomes.
2) Answer the question: Does your organization need a strategic plan?
3) Know why external socio-economic trends that affect your organization drive the need for strategic planning.
4) Create an organizational culture assessment to determine your readiness to embark on a strategic planning process.
5) Be able to recognize the principles of strategic plan leadership and see how your personal leadership style will impact the effectiveness of your role in it.
6) Acquire a tool box of strategic planning resources and support services to grow your ability to be engage decision makers and funders critical to plan development.
7) Examine the elements of staff and stakeholder participation to maximize the opportunities for plan implementation and enduring constructive change within the organizational culture.

Why Strategic Plan Now For You and Your Organization?
The pace of technological and organizational change is faster and more profound than at almost any time in the past 30 years, as radical as the horse to automobile transition. How we use Twitter and the web, do online research making libraries obsolete (well, not quite), Skype, or use emerging social media networks is transforming the way interpreters communicate at work and home. Online interpretive publications and forums are replacing journals, magazines, personal meetings and newsletters. Web design and content development and forums are replacing journals, magazines, personal meetings and newsletters. We can, or may soon be able to, take one-on-one interpretive skills, in some instances. Interpreter duty statements are changing to reflect this communication revolution. The “virtual” naturalist or historical interpreter is no longer science fiction. We can, or may soon be able to, take an interactive one with us into the backcountry, museum or historical site with a GPS device. There is also an unmistakable trend for visitor centers to become more dependent on docents, interns and volunteers. Whole interpreter staffing programs are eliminated for public safety staffing needs. Park agencies are being downsized and merged into Public Works departments in California and elsewhere. Managers, when faced with budget restraints, may choose to eliminate an interpreter position and create an Information Technology or volunteer management/trainer position instead. QR codes can replace interpretive signage or well crafted text. And interpreter pay scales are not
keeping up with inflation or other similar skilled professions in the nonprofit and government arenas. How the interpretive workplace is impacted by technological and organizational change, and how fast, is unprecedented.

Strategic planning looks at the external trends that affect you and your workplace while creating a collective long-term vision based on staff and stakeholder input. The process will respond to and forge a forward-thinking organizational roadmap to an uncertain future. Anticipating change is the hallmark of a good interpretive mission-driven strategic plan. The plan structure tends to work best when it is customized in form and function to meet both the organizational needs and executive management priorities, with buy-in from all levels of the organization. Strategic plans can be designed to complement existing interpretive, work, and master plans, as these plans focus more on internal controllable factors in the work environment. In this way, the organization is not surprised by internal and external trends when they occur. Strategic planning processes are flexible by nature and characterized by adaptive management processes and adherence to best management practices. The strategic planning process uses systems principles to define and integrate the mission, long-term goals, work plans, budgets, staffing structures, evaluation, decision-making processes and external environmental trends. They routinely look at a three to five year planning horizon. One model that will be introduced divides the plan into integrated Policy, Program, Organizational Development, Process and Evaluation segments.

Conclusion
The interpretive world is moving from incremental to transformational change in many agencies and organizations. Will you be able to adapt? Do you want to adapt or be a change agent and leader in the planning process? Or do you want to move on and find a better job niche elsewhere? This workshop will help you identify the internal and external factors that shape your existing organizational culture and job role.

How will these forces impact your future in the short and long term? Will you lead, follow, or anticipate change and adapt before others? Understanding strategic planning can help you answer these questions and improve your current job satisfaction and planning for future training, career development or leadership opportunities.