



Early Care &
Learning Council

United to Promote Quality

Strategic Planning for Child Care Businesses

Learn how to create a strategic plan for your child care business with information derived from Finding Your North Star™.

Introduction

Strategic planning is one of the most important tasks for business leaders since it allows them to have a long-term direction and keep on course while they focus on the day-to-day of their enterprise. For child care businesses, planning helps you prepare for goals and challenges, positioning you for success. This guide explains why a strategic plan is important and how to create one for your business.

Why do I need a strategic plan for my business?

A strategic plan is like a detailed map that shows your business's goals, the steps to achieve them, and how to measure success. It helps everyone involved understand the project's vision and provides a structure for making decisions, using resources wisely, and finding growth opportunities. With a solid strategic plan, your business will have a strong base for long-term growth and profitability. Without an effective plan, businesses risk wasting resources and missing opportunities. To give your business the best chance of success, take the time to create a thoughtful strategic plan for your long-term goals.

Can I create my own strategic plan?

Yes! You absolutely can create your own strategic plan – the process is not as difficult as it may seem. We will help you get started using Civitas Strategies' Finding Your North Star™ process for strategic planning. Finding Your North Star™ is a proven strategic planning process that is easy to use, produces great results, and can be adapted to your business' liking.

Strategic Planning Steps

The core pieces of a strategic plan include your mission and vision, a comprehensive analysis of your current situation, setting specific, measurable goals, developing

strategies and action plans, implementing your plan, and finally monitoring and evaluating your progress regularly.

The Finding Your North Star™ system is broken down into four phases:

Phase I – Kickoff

Recommended timing: (1 – 3 weeks)

- Gather your team
- Prepare to meet
- Hold your first meeting

Organizations need to start with the right team (5 – 7 members, but no more than 10) and the end goal in mind. Gather your team to prepare for kickoff, hold the kickoff, and set dates.

The first step is to create the planning team, selecting individuals who bring diverse skills and perspectives that will be crucial for a comprehensive strategy. Once the team is formed, the next step is to prepare for the kickoff. This involves gathering the team to review the planning process, ensuring everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, and identifying key questions that need to be addressed. The third step is to hold the kickoff meeting. This initial gathering sets the tone for the entire strategic planning process, allowing the team to align objectives, methodologies, and expectations. Finally, set dates for future planning sessions. Establishing a timeline with specific milestones and deadlines ensures that the planning process remains on track and that progress can be regularly monitored and evaluated.

Phase II – Landscape Assessment

Recommended timing: (4 – 6 weeks)

- Decide who to ask, what to ask, and how to ask
- Review the data for key themes and observations

The landscape assessment is one of the most critical steps in the strategic planning process, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the current environment and informs future decisions. To build this complete picture, it is essential to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The first step in this process is to identify whose voices offer deep insight and nuanced perspectives that can highlight areas of strength and concern. We find holding interviews with key stakeholders, focus groups, and surveys as common methods to collect data. The differences between an interview, focus group, and survey are the amount of people you are interacting with, and how you interact with them. Interviews allow for the detailed collection of a single stakeholder's perspective and are easier to execute, while focus groups collect many stakeholder's perspectives but are more challenging to facilitate as you are now communicating with a group of people. Similar to a focus group, surveys can easily collect large amounts of data but

without any direct contact with the stakeholder, you are not guaranteed to receive all responses. When conducting your assessment, consider a few of these questions:

- What is the greatest value an organization provides to the communities it serves?
- What are the greatest challenges an organization faces in meeting its mission?

After collecting the data, the next step is to assess it thoroughly, identifying patterns, trends, and outliers that can influence strategic directions. When reviewing the data, ask yourself:

- What does the data tell us about where the community is heading?
- What trends does your data tell you and how does that relate to the national trends?

In analyzing data, it's important to first organize the data into topics or categories you can understand. Qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, can be grouped by themes or topics while quantitative data, such as survey responses, can be compiled into spreadsheets or databases. Based on your data findings, you can identify your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Group these four categories into a table which will serve as your SWOT analysis.

Phase III – Team Planning

Recommended timing: (4 – 8 weeks)

- Agree on the main ideas to guide your planning
- Identify your business's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
- Define how you will measure success
- Create goals and the strategies to reach them
- Identify what steps to take, who will take them, and when

In this phase, focus on establishing goals and strategies that will serve as the foundation of your strategic plan and select the actions that will drive your mission. Planning is one of the most important things an organization will do, and to do it effectively takes time.

- Step 1: Principles of Design
 - Principles of Design create parameters for designing planned strategy, by stating upfront what the organization needs to include or exclude in each strategy.
- Step 2: Goal Setting
 - Review your SWOT analysis to identify primary challenges and opportunities and take some time to vote on what goals are most likely to advance the community or organization.
- Step 3: Metrics of Success

- Define how your organization sees success and what it can look like as you strive towards your goals. Ensure that your metrics of success are all agreed upon and understood by the team.
- Step 4: Strategy Design
 - Strategies are the ways you plan to reach your goals. Focus on one goal at each time and think as a team to prioritize which strategies to pursue.
- Step 5: Action Planning
 - Identify low/no-cost actions and timelines for implementation for each prioritized strategy.

Phase IV – Alignment & Communication

Recommended timing: (1 – 4 weeks)

- Approve your plan
- Create talking points
- Share your plan with stakeholders
- Set a timeline for checking in, collecting feedback, and refining your approach
- Get started with the implementation

The final charge in the strategic planning process is to consider how to effectively communicate the plan to all relevant stakeholders. This begins with a thorough review of the plan by the organization's leadership to ensure alignment with overall goals and objectives. As the plan progresses into the implementation phase, regularly scheduled reviews are essential to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments. The communication process involves several key steps. First, planning and rollout should be organized to ensure a smooth transition from planning to execution. Next, the plan must be clearly written, detailing specific actions, timelines, and responsibilities. A team review follows, where everyone agrees upon the process and understands what needs to take place. Afterwards, stakeholders review the plan and approve, or provide additional insight as the final approval.

Pro Tips for a Successful Roll Out:

- Include stakeholders from the start of your planning process. Your stakeholders hold incredible value and insight. Keeping them in the loop and including them from the very beginning of your planning process ensures that all needs are met.
- Agree on key talking points about your new plan. Identify unique parts of your plan and fully understand what makes them important. Think about how you can communicate the value your plan brings to external individuals.
- Document everything. As you progress according to your plan, take note of the progress as this will help ensure you stay on track and can be helpful to refer back to in the future.
- Think about how you are going to communicate information to others. As your plan progresses and you get updates, are you going to provide brief updates to the public? Are you going to provide detailed reports to stakeholders?

Conclusion

The steps Finding Your North Star™ provides will guide you to the successful completion of a strategic plan, however, don't be afraid to adjust the course of action to your unique situation. The information contained will equip you to start and end the process on your own, but you can also collaborate with others to provide support. Remember, you are not alone! There are resources available to help you craft the best strategic plan for your business.

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