Step 6: Revisit Your Strategy and Repeat the Process

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Organizations that are most effective at implementation over time continually revisit their strategic plans, viewing their strategies as anchors, not constraints, to what they can achieve. As you implement in years two, three, four, or five of your strategy, it is a good idea to repeat all of the steps we’ve described. On an annual basis, the first two steps (Translate and Create) may take less time and effort if you are simply updating the initiatives established at the outset of your implementation process. As Sam Cobbs, executive director of First Place for Youth, explained, “Having a strategic plan and objectives that are well articulated makes the process a whole lot easier. There isn’t a lot that is up for debate. Everything we do has to lead to those objectives that were articulated in the plan.”

In 2008, Bridgespan had the opportunity to help First Place for Youth develop a new strategic plan. The organization’s mission is to help foster youth make a successful transition to self-sufficiency and responsible adulthood. It uses a rigorous “game-planning process,” whereby it revisits its strategic plan, sets annual goals, connects those goals to its budget, and defines individual performance objectives. (See the sidebar "Annual Game-Planning Process" below for more details.) The process begins in January, six months before the beginning of its fiscal year. As Cobbs said, “It sounds like its year-round planning, but it is only intensive for a couple of months; the time, between mid-January and mid-April is the busiest time for us.”

A Template to Guide Step 6: Revisiting Your Strategy and Repeating the Process

Creating a calendar to help you stay on top of this important cycle may help. This Annual Implementation Timeline is a starting point for thinking about the flow of implementation activities over the course of a year as you implement for results.

Establishing this type of annual planning cycle can help align your entire organization around core priorities. As Cobbs said of his organization’s reaction to a clear planning cycle, “There is palpable excitement about the game-planning process. This is what people are talking about, what is ringing through the halls as everyone is setting their plan for the coming year.” Unifying the organization around the strategy is particularly critical given the turnover that most organizations experience. As Cobbs explained, “There isn’t a board member [today] who was on my board when we went through the strategic planning process [three years ago]. Of my senior staff, only two were present.”

Being purposeful about implementing a new strategy is never easy, but the result is well worth the effort. Grellman of Goodwill Industries described the benefits his organization has experienced from planning for implementation, saying, “It has further fostered the integration of our strategic goals into the everyday work across the organization, allowed us to leverage what we know now (which is far more than a year ago), forced us to look at external macro-trends and assess how they impact our strategies, and it has given us the opportunity to further sharpen our focus.”
Ultimately, we believe that focusing on implementation as much as strategy development is what helps organizations achieve better results. The improved outcomes your organization can achieve by executing its strategy well, year after year, can create a better future for the people and places you serve. When done right, effective implementation can be the difference between simply good intentions and truly great impact.

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<th>Annual Game-Planning Process*</th>
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**Six months before your new fiscal year**
- Kick off game-planning by having staff review your strategic plan and discuss the opportunities and challenges experienced over the previous year
- Establish working committees to develop detailed game plans for departments and strategic initiatives
- Hold board retreat to review your strategy, discuss previous year’s accomplishments, and set goals for coming year
- Kick-off budgeting by reviewing historical data and begin to get input from game-planning committees about resource needs

**Three months before the start of a new fiscal year**
- Hold game-planning "summit" for departments and initiative teams to present their plans and get input on open questions
- Begin detailed budgeting process

**One month before your new fiscal year**
- Finalize annual game plan (COO leads the process)
- Conduct staff evaluations and set goals for coming year that are aligned with annual game plan

**At the start of your fiscal year**
- Launch game plan with organization-wide communications
- Distribute copies of your annual game plan (includes final budget) to all board members and staff

*Based on First Place for Youth’s approach