

# **VISION AND STRATEGY**

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**Involvement of the Board in  
Developing a Vision and Purpose, and  
Creating a Strategy for a Not for Profit**

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# WHY: THE VISION AND STRATEGY OF A NFP



## What is a Not for Profit (NFP) Vision and Strategy?

A **vision** is exactly what it sounds like; it's a description of a desired end state. An example of a vision statement may describe how things would be differently as a result of the focus of the NFP activities, or how the NFP may want to be seen publicly by others.

A **strategy**, on the other hand, is a planned set of actions that remains the key responsibility of the Board. The strategy of a NFP may involve the determination of long term goals (i.e. mission, vision and values), objectives which reflect the relationship that the NFP wishes to have with its different beneficiaries and how the NFP may intend to address important stakeholder needs.

The Board may test and approve the strategy, however it will be substantively developed by management.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the degree to which the Board contributes to developing the strategy, it's fundamental role to provide strategic thinking to critical decision-making processes remains crucial.<sup>2</sup> Developing the vision and purpose of a NFP will inevitably influence how the strategy is created, continually progressed, and practically monitored and implemented.

## Why is it crucial to a NFPs growth?

A **vision statement** isn't just an exercise; it truly defines the core reason for a NFPs existence, and can transform ordinary tasks to a deeper and more meaningful level. A vision statement attracts and engages passionate, like-minded employees.

A corporate vision statement, for example, may give everyone clarity around the bigger picture, setting the stage for improved decision-making and targeting the right customers and community.<sup>3</sup>



It is important to note that effective business leaders, including those around the board table, must articulate a clear set of **values**. These values establish a framework for what is considered to be acceptable within an NFP. These values must be lived by every person, especially board members and management executives.<sup>4</sup> Every employee looks to the leadership team to lead and drive the NFP forward.

**Values** are not the same as ethical guidelines or codes of conduct.<sup>5</sup> Guidelines and codes are specific rules about what a board member can and cannot do. Values, on the other hand, are more profound and enduring. An NFPs vision and values communicate beliefs.<sup>6</sup> This is why it is so integral and important to have an **established vision and core set of values** driving the NFP forward, in order to influence momentum and drive change.

According to the research,<sup>7</sup> the importance of having a well-developed mission and vision statement will fundamentally enable the board to define the 'business of the NFP' so its energy can be spent in pursuit of compatible results, to define funding sources compatible with the mission of the NFP, to enable the board to decide how to spend resources so budgets can be tied to the most critical results the NFP wants to achieve (highlighting necessary skill sets), to allow the board to make decisions about which programs and projects to undertake and which to avoid, and to enable the NFP to develop and deliver its planning with action listed steps.

Last but not least, developing a vision statement captures the process of development. Inevitably, it will cause the board members to begin to form closer bonds, share expectations about the future of their NFP, and understand the differences in points of view among board members.<sup>8</sup> These differences may be resolved through the use of vision statements as they develop and become implemented across the initiatives of that NFP.

# PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TIPS FOR THE NFP SECTOR



## What are the important considerations for the NFP sector?

It remains critical to identify the scope of activities and programs to be run, and which goals and objectives are to be achieved.<sup>9</sup> To create a strategy that is both effective and measurable, NFPs first need to translate their core mission into a narrower, quantifiable operational mission. The NFP then needs to convert the operational mission into a strategy platform, taking into account the NFP's Constitution and the objects which set out the purpose. Only then can it make reasoned and strategic decisions about which programs to run and how to run them. Most of the NFPs operating today make program decisions based on a mission rather than on a strategy. Acting without a clear long-term strategy can stretch a NFP's core capabilities and push it in unintended directions. Like all NFPs, it must decide how much of a stretch is necessary, even visionary, and how much is a drift and a drain.

If you sit on a **Board**,<sup>10</sup> it is important to consider:

- What decisions do you need to make now to meet future financial needs?
- To what extent are we prepared to tolerate failure in pursuit of innovation?
- How does the community's perception of us impact our ability to achieve our objectives?

A **NFP strategy** outlines how the NFP will achieve key priorities aligned to its purpose thus fulfil its operational mission.<sup>11</sup> Once the platform is in place, the NFP will be able to make reasoned, strategic decisions about which programs to run and how to run them. According to the research,<sup>12</sup> it is suggested a strategy platform must consist of **four key components**:

1. Client and market development;
2. Program and service development and delivery;
3. Funder and donor development; and
4. Development and governance.

The strategy platform must address each component directly, which indirectly will address the NFPs operational mission. Practically, the program and service delivery model ought to maintain its funding model, which will reinforce the organisational model. Most importantly, every program must implement and continuously speak to its strategy platform on a frequent basis.

Finally, before a NFP begins to scale and deepen its impact within the NFP sector, it is recommended to have all **seven of these elements** in place to some degree:

1. It must develop a clear and well-focused mission;
2. It must hone in on its strategy;
3. It must practice rigorous evaluation;
4. It must display insight and courage that fosters real change;
5. Equally, it must manage its talent to build high-performance;
6. It must fund its efforts adequately; and
7. It must ensure effective board governance.



Exhibit 1. Blueprint of a Strategy Platform. © 2004 Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.<sup>12</sup>

## What are some practical tips that can be used in the NFP sector?

Some practical tips from experienced leaders within the NFP sector:

- Involve the Board in setting the strategy – pose a key strategic question, tell the story by giving relevant facts and information, and then discuss collectively. A good question to ask is: **are we in this for the long-term?**
- Management buy in is essential – if they don't believe passionately in the strategy they won't be able to sell the strategy to the NFP;
- To get the strategy right, it is recommended to focus on **four things**:<sup>12</sup>
  1. Set sensible stretch in what you are trying to achieve, run hard or go backwards quickly;
  2. Smaller is better – set a small list of key priorities to focus on; and
  3. Finally, execution is everything in strategy; having a plan is great but it needs to be executed to be achievable, and needs to be monitored to keep people accountable.
- Take a partnership approach to setting strategy – if you happen to reset the strategy, it is important to assess if the current Board have the right mix of set of skills to realise it;
- To be human centric in creating strategy – it needs a future outlook; and
- Many donors will want to attach strings to their contributions influencing the nature of the program or starting an entirely new initiative. Before a NFP alters its program portfolio, it must evaluate the repercussions that it would have on its operational mission. If an initiative lies outside the scope of the operational mission, the NFP must resist the temptation to cater to donors' wishes and respectfully object.<sup>13</sup>



# BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES: CREATING AND EMBEDDING THE VISION AND STRATEGY

## Why is the board's involvement vital to the creation of the NFPs vision and strategy?

Whilst vision and strategy are inexplicably linked, the responsibilities of the Board do differ subtly between these two areas.

### Vision

- It is the responsibility of the Board to approve the vision, which forms a key component of the ethical framework of a NFP.<sup>13</sup> This framework should guide the decision making of the NFP and as such, should be reflected in the relevant policies and processes of that NFP. The Board should endeavour to continually embed the ethical framework into all aspects of governance so that the NFP can pursue its purpose effectively;
- Whilst a NFPs vision and purpose is initially determined at formation, that does not mean there aren't ongoing responsibilities for the Board. An NFP may have reason to adjust their purpose over time, and the Board has a responsibility to ensure the legality of any such changes are appropriately addressed; and
- It is important that the Board monitors alignment across the NFPs activities<sup>14</sup> and purposes – having a robust approach to strategy will assist the Board in their responsibilities. Ultimately the vision and purpose of a NFP will influence how the strategy is developed, progressed, implemented and monitored, and in turn will influence the wins of that NFPs initiatives.



## **Strategy**

Strategy is a key responsibility of the Board.<sup>15</sup> How the board engages in developing its strategy will vary depending on the characteristics, size and complexity of the NFP, including the availability of resources (staff and volunteers) capable of planning, delivery and execution of outcomes.

### **The Board:**

- The Board of a NFP is responsible for approving its strategy and budget;
- Whilst strategy development may be shared between the board and management, Boards must work with management to identify and agree:
  - The process to develop and review the strategy;
  - The NFPs goals, and present position in relation to achieving those goals; and
  - What steps need to be taken to move closer to achieving these goals.
- The final approval of the NFPs strategic plan should take place at a board meeting.

As a collective, the board is to help drive the strategic vision that has been put together by the employees, community, members and board. A good board goes through a co-design process. The board needs to understand its members, employees, stakeholders, and clientele (community). The constitution and rule book from which an NFP is working from must be clear, and the board itself holds integrity and has transparency with all dealings. Any strategic plan must behave as a prototype – being that the NFP can adapt, change, and is flexible and fluid to navigate changing environments (e.g. COVID-19). However, the plan must always follow the vision statement in line with the strategic future plan and vision of that NFP. A strategic vision is only as valuable as the diverse group of people at the table who come up with that strategic plan.<sup>21</sup>





### **The Role of the Board relevant to creation of strategy: Legal Considerations**

The Law, the Corporations Act 2001 s 198A (1),<sup>22</sup> provides that the business of a NFP is to be managed by or under the direction of the directors. An example of an important legal document for a NFP Board is the Constitution. The Constitution will generally dictate a set of rules, procedures and policies for the Board to follow, in line with its decision-making processes. Board members need to be aware that there may be the presence of beneficiaries in any given NFP.<sup>16</sup>

Aside from laws and bylaws, the creation of a vision statement and strategic plan, in partnership of the board, allow for:

- Diverse viewpoints to reinforce the quality of the strategic plan and related decisions;
- Improves the board's understanding of the NFPs business environment and its sense of ownership and accountability; and
- Ensures that the executive team and board members work in a collaborative rather than confrontational setting.<sup>19</sup>



## Who does the board depend upon to create their vision and strategy?

Smaller NFPs	Larger NFPs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The board may develop strategic plans and budgets or delegate the tasks to a committee of the board (e.g. Finance, Planning, etc.);</li> <li>• The board may be more involved in developing the strategic plan, with specific board members having specific expertise in the industry, being delegated to a committee of the board, and the board, as a whole, instilling a rigorous process and ensuring the plan is implemented; and</li> <li>• NFPs with active volunteer committee structures and a small number of staff may establish a joint staff-volunteer planning group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NFPs that are primarily run by a professional staff will develop plans and budgets for approval by the board;</li> <li>• In larger NFPs, the strategy development would normally be delegated to management either directly or indirectly through a committee, and the board would review, challenge, approve, monitor and oversee functions;<sup>17</sup></li> <li>• In the case forming a committee, outside experts can help to provide independent, external perspective, free of emotional commitments;<sup>19</sup></li> <li>• NFP stakeholders can be engaged in the strategic planning process by identifying representatives, systematically soliciting and incorporating feedback to create priorities, and reporting back;<sup>20</sup></li> <li>• In cases where the board is not fully across or involved in developing the strategic plan and budgets, it may be wise for the board to meet with the planning group to discuss the planning assumptions and initial strategy proposals in place to approve guidelines for the planners;</li> <li>• The board's responsibility for approving strategy requires directors to schedule enough time for proper and thorough review and discussion. The discussion usually takes place at a board strategy session with staff present;</li> <li>• Ideally, the CEO should clearly be designated the chief strategic officer to develop the strategic plans and submit them to the board. The board would then schedule sufficient time for discussion, debate, and review before approving the strategic plan;<sup>18</sup> and</li> <li>• The board subsequently approves the strategic plan at a board meeting.</li> </ul>

Exhibit 2. The strategy and development may be shared between board and management, however the degree of the role will depend on the size and nature of the organisation, including the availability of staff and volunteers capable of planning.<sup>17</sup>

# The Board's Role in the Planning Process



## 1. Preparation

Staff prepare for the board session by assembling background information and recommendations. This might include:

- Previous year's plans, budgets, financial and statistical information;
  - A summary of the current year's activities and progress, etc.;
  - Information from conferences of organizations in similar fields;
  - Directions from any national or international body;
  - Information on government policy and legislation that could affect the organization;
  - The key issues identified by SWOT analysis and risk management procedures; and
  - Management's strategic recommendations.
- This material forms part of the planning records and should be retained for use in the plan and for future reference.



## 2. Discussion

The board meets with key staff and volunteers (where appropriate) to discuss and approve staff recommendations.

The minutes and notes from the planning session also become part of the planning records. They provide guidance for staff in developing plans and a record for the board of discussions and decisions.

They may include:

- Decisions to retain or amend the Vision, Mission and Values;
- Decisions to continue or change the organization's strategy;
- New projects and programs including timing and the names of the individuals or committees responsible for them; and
- The key measurements that will be used to monitor performance and progress.

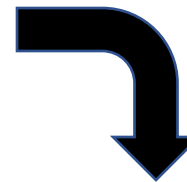


Exhibit 3. The Board's Role in the Planning Process.<sup>6</sup>



## 3. Approval

Using the guidance and approvals from the board strategy session:

- Staff prepare the formal strategic plan then,
- The formal strategic plan is presented to the board for approval at a board meeting.



## 4. Communication

Once the board has approved the strategy and plan they can be communicated to staff and volunteers for use in developing the operational and capital plans and budgets.

The board should make sure that the strategy is communicated (usually in abbreviated form) to key stakeholders.

This can contribute to building community interest, support and funding for the organization's programs and activities

## How can the board be involved in embedding their vision and strategy?

The board plays a vital role in embedding and reinforcing a vision-driven NFP community. Though board directors do not directly participate in the daily operations of running the NFP, they use several avenues to communicate and highlight the vision and strategy that inevitably guide the NFPs current (and future) planned initiatives.

Decisions by the board should further the NFPs vision and strategy. The board should apply a **strategic lens** to their decision-making. This means that they should make their decisions in the context of the broader strategy, but also consider how their decisions may impact the NFP strategy for better or worse.<sup>19</sup>

The next page includes a list of few approaches the board can adopt to lead the way in strengthening a vision-based narrative of a NFP:



## Board Assessment

- A standing agenda item to be added in board meetings to help re-iterate the vision of the NFP;
- The integration of vision as a core evaluation criterion helps when assessing new strategic proposals;
- Assessment can be held for the alignment of the ongoing strategy and its activities with the vision statement;
- If board directors participate in any of the NFP subcommittee, a greater awareness of the vision helps influence the strategic thinking and decisions;
- The board can also use the vision as a performance metric for the CEO and, in turn, the CEO with the executive management team;
- For the board, the NFP employee survey results also serve as an invaluable assessment tool of the NFP alignment to the vision and its strategy; and
- A discussion with NFP stakeholders/ investors to relate to their long-term plans to help make sound strategic decisions in alignment to the vision.

## Board Induction Program

- The induction of any new board director to commence with clearly defining the vision of the NFP and the strategies that the NFP has created to seamlessly extend the set vision; and
- A new board member can participate in NFP activities to connect with the vision and strategy to help influence a creation of a consistent NFP cultural mindset amongst all board members.

## Board External Communications

- The board can strongly communicate their commitment to the NFP vision and their complete confidence in its strategy through the annual report. This will greatly help in sending out a message to employees and stakeholders about the board's support and trust in the vision and strategy; and
- Through media reports, the board can use this channel to openly endorse the NFP strategy and future planning to gain trust of the stakeholders and the people connected to the NFP.

## Board Vision Revalidation

- The board to adopt a regular check-in approach either biyearly/ yearly to revalidate the NFP vision is aligned to the current demands/challenges and future roadmap of the NFP; and
- The board can seek external consultant advice about outward influencing factors that can force amendment of vision to help the NFP continue to stay relevant and relatable.

# PEOPLE & PROCESS: TO VISIT AND REVALIDATE THE VISION AND STRATEGY



## Why is it important for the NFP to visit and revalidate the vision and strategy?

A NFP's mission rarely changes, but how it is expressed can be improved or adjusted on an ongoing basis. Fundamentally, the vision must respond to strategic updates. Values also may shift in how they are expressed or what is included in the vision statement. Annual or other regular reviews are recommended as part of an open discussion or board self-assessment and evaluation process. The board should constantly be reviewing their NFP's progress through a strategic lens.<sup>17</sup>

An NFP needs to use a co-design process when assessing how well the NFP is progressing.<sup>19</sup> This process may involve actively engaging with management, staff, community, stakeholders and Traditional Custodians of the Land, where business is being conducted;

- Strategy should be a part of all board discussions: capital allocation, talent oversight, CEO succession, executive compensation and risk oversight, to name a few. All of these elements should be looked at through a strategy lens: **what is the company's strategy now and what will it be in the future?**
- If your NFP is in the process of reinvention or pivoting from its traditional strategy, then the board will want to develop new signposts to help determine if the strategy is working. If, however, the strategy isn't working, the board shouldn't just wait for change to happen. It needs to actively engage with management and support the NFP.

## How does the board get involved in the review process?

### **A Board may periodically review (revisit and revalidate) the vision and strategy by:**

- Reviewing progress towards the NFP's purpose and strategy, being a key responsibility of the board;<sup>20</sup>
- Monitoring progress against agreed measures, and assessing the degree to which strategy implementation has been successful as a part of normal board oversight. There are several practical steps a board can take in order to place emphasis on the achievement of strategic objectives, including the addition of a standing agenda item to consider strategy, or requesting each presentation to the board to include the impact on the achievement of the NFP's strategic objectives;
- At a more holistic level, reviewing the strategy at least once a year on the basis of what has been learnt. Not only is this an invaluable source of learning to inform future direction when the board sets this time aside, however this also signals to staff and volunteers that learning from lived experience is important to achieve set objectives of the NFPs vision and purpose;
- Board Directors may want to consider what it means to revisit and revalidate a NFPs vision and purpose, for example, this may include research into best practice of boards;
- Boards should internally prioritise to receive regular progress reports on measurable objectives, including explanations of variances and plans to address them e.g. by engaging an external consultant annually to focus upon feedback and self-evaluation etc.

Finally, board directors should question anything that may stem curiosity. An example may include the fact that the board receive large regular reports that compare actual performance results to targets. When actual performance varies from target, the board is provided with explanations and any proposed responses. An important lesson learnt from the readings<sup>19</sup> is that if something doesn't feel right – speak up!

# CONCLUSION

Developing the vision and purpose of a NFP will inevitably influence how the strategy is created, continually progressed and practically monitored. A key responsibility of the board is keeping the NFP accountable to working towards enacting the vision and purpose through a strategically set of planned actions. How the Board is involved in the strategic development planning depends on the size and nature of the NFP, including the availability of resources (staff and volunteers) capable of planning, delivery and execution of outcomes. It must be understood that the board and management collaborate to create the strategic plan and vision, however planning and implementing the strategic objectives selected will be the role of management.

Ultimately, the board plays a vital role in embedding and reinforcing a vision-driven NFP community through applying a strategic lens to its decision-making processes. The board leads the way in strengthening a vision-based narrative of a NFP, and will continue to do so through reviewing (revisiting and revalidating) its vision, purpose and strategic direction.

*“Your strategic plan can never be a plan, it has to be created as a prototype. It must be fluid and adaptive to navigate the changing environment” - Sharon Wood-Kenney, Djinda Bridiya Wellbeing Founder.*





# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

## **Paige Wood-Kenney**

Paige is a final year University student completing a Bachelor of Biomedical Science and Forensics. She is a proud Yok of the Bibbulman nation and of Noongar Yamattji descent. In her aim to be a strong advocate for the tough conversations on disruptive thinking and challenging non-functioning systems, she has selected the ELGP program to enhance and grow skills to be a strong and unique mind for cross-cultural awareness, all while bringing people together with strong leadership style and integrity through a complex cultural lens with a scope.

## **Sarah Connor**

Sarah is an accomplished project manager committed to improving the health of her community. Sarah's motivation to join ELGP was driven by the recognition of the power in partnerships between health and social care in achieving better outcomes for all. Through the program, Sarah has expanded her skills and confidence to be a leader who strengthens these relationships in her local community.

## **Sasha Johnson**

Sasha is a recent university graduate, passionate about continually giving back to the local community. For Sasha, the ELGP program has been a fantastic grounding base to equip herself with the fundamental skills and duties required of a Board Director, with the intention to be part of the higher end decision-making conversations and processes to bring about positive change, and make a real difference, within her local community.

## **Troy Hayter**

Troy is an educational leader with expertise in supporting the holistic and diverse needs of youth through his experience as a Secondary Principal and System Consultant in Learning Equity. The ELGP has provided Troy with further learning and understanding of Board Leadership of NFP aged care and community services; and further direction towards his aspirations for a NFP Board Directorship aligned with his values and motivation to support people in need in our community.

## **Vidhatri Lakkim Setti**

Vidhatri is a technology manager with over 15 years of international experience of delivering and embedding successful multimillion dollars strategic digital transformation initiatives. This program offers Vidhatri an invaluable platform to harness her leadership capability and passion for community service. While serving on a board that directly impacts the quality of people's lives, it is of utmost importance 'to do it right' by being competent, and she sees this program as an opportunity to empower her with the resources and exposure to confidently do it - the right way.

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