



# From Plan to Action

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A practical guide to implementing  
your strategic plan

# Introduction

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We've all been there – we spend significant time and resources creating a strategic plan, and then when it comes to executing it, something else takes priority. While we understand the benefits of creating clear goals for our teams, they can sometimes be challenging to translate into tangible actions.

Successfully implementing your strategic plan helps you engage your team and stakeholders, show meaningful progress, and demonstrate transparency. It also allows you to track and measure results and make the most of budgets and allocated resources.

Alternatively, failing to implement a strategic plan can expose your organisation to various risks. Setting a course without anyone steering the ship in the right direction can result in unutilised resources, wasted time, and investment.

So, what usually goes wrong? After creating a strategic plan, we tend to focus on what to do next and become stuck in the weeds. We rarely create a well-defined action plan that aligns with the budget, sets clear priorities, or measures progress. On top of this, not every action plan is created equal. Many are loosely defined, not adequately assigned, or aligned with key performance measures.

**This guide explores how to put your strategic plan into action.**

**We'll outline the elements of a well-designed action plan, discuss how to gain organisation-wide commitment, and provide tips on how you can execute for ultimate success.**

# Strategic Plans vs. Action Plans vs. Execution

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## **Your Strategic Plan**

Looks at the big picture. It creates a vision of your destination, the significant steps or initiatives it will take to get there, and looks at what roadblocks may arise along the way.



## **Your Action Plan**

Translates your strategic plan into specific steps and performance measures. It covers the nuts and bolts of what steps you will take when you get there, how much it's going to cost, and who is responsible.



## **Execution**

This is where all your planning comes to life. You can have the best laid plans, but execution is about getting things done. It's essential you have the right people in the right seats to deliver on your strategy and implement your actions.



# 5

## Tips to to turn your strategic plan into action

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### 1. Align your plans with the budget

Even the most innovative strategy will fail without dollars behind it. Early on, ensure your strategic goals are genuinely reflected in the budget. Consider building your budget process around contributing to the outcome areas in the strategic plan. It's essential that council, policymakers, and the public can see how the strategic plan feeds into operations and capital improvement expenditures.



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### 2. Be Specific with your initiatives

Vague action plans will result in ambiguous outcomes. Without specific, concrete steps and tasks, an action plan lacks urgency and feels separate from everyday reality.

The high-level goals of your strategic plan come alive when you break them down into a series of bite-sized initiatives or tasks. Rather than serving as a glorified to-do list, each item should tell the person completing precisely what they'll be doing. Here's what you should consider when breaking down your initiatives:

- What are the moving parts of each initiative?
- Who will tackle each task?
- What are the start and end dates for each? Are they realistic?
- How will you know when the initiative or task is complete?
- How will you know if each task has been successful?



# 5

## Tips to to turn your strategic plan into action

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### 3. Set Clear Priorities

When you're creating a plan, it's easy to be optimistic about what you'll be able to accomplish. Prioritisation will help with the tough decisions necessary to ensure the important things get done.

Setting priorities can be tricky—after all, everything in your strategic plan is important. However, the oft-repeated saying, “if everything is a priority, nothing is a priority,” applies here. Without a pecking order, you may do a lot of running around without any results.



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Here are some tips to help you set clear priorities:

- If possible, arrange a time to sit down with your leadership group and a calendar.
- Start by staggering the start and end dates for each action item. If nothing has a due date, or if everything is due at the end of the planning period, then your team could spend valuable time guessing what a priority is.
- Staggered end dates also avoid the rush of delivering everything at once. For each initiative, discuss where you are now and where you'd like to be in a year and put the action items necessary to do so into the calendar.



# 5

## Tips to to turn your strategic plan into action

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### 4. Consider the WHY

Once you've set your action items, take a look at each and ask yourself two questions;

- What problem are you solving?
- What does success look like?

This helps to define why each action step is essential. The people assigned to each action item need to understand why it exists and what they're aiming for—otherwise, it simply won't happen.



To implement a plan, everyone - down to interim and seasonal employees - needs to understand where you're going and how they fit in.

### 5. Involve the Entire Organisation

Too often, the flow of information surrounding the action plan stops with department heads and supervisors, leaving front-line staff in the dark. However, to implement a plan, everyone - down to interim and seasonal employees - needs to understand where you're going and how they fit in.

It's essential to reassure the council and stakeholders that their priorities are top of mind. It also motivates staff and managers, affirming their hard work is paying off and builds trust with the community, showing steady progress towards meaningful goals.



# Tracking your progress

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An adequate system for reporting on progress provides insight into which of your efforts are meeting the mark - and which ones are falling short.

The result: you'll make better decisions and get more out of every dollar.



## **Set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

Each specific action item should have a corresponding KPI to chart its performance. The best KPIs are quantifiable and easy to communicate, giving staff, managers, and other stakeholders concrete goals to aspire to and helping them to track progress along the way.

Often, department heads are best positioned to generate appropriate KPIs - after all, they know their areas best. This also gives managers the responsibility to shape their KPIs and fosters a deep level of buy-in.



## **Create a Culture of Accountability**

Progress reporting is a significant determinant of whether a plan will stick. Many organisations only review progress and performance annually or semi-annually when department heads fill out spreadsheets to report their results. There are obvious drawbacks to such an approach:

- Spreadsheets are unengaging and onerous for the department manager.
- Progress reporting becomes retroactive, and managers forget many of the highlights,
- Managers may omit challenges faced during the year that could unveil growth opportunities.
- If the results are disappointing, it may already be too late to change tactics.
- The results are hidden from the majority of the team.

A purpose-built tool for managing performance makes it easier to identify, track, analyse and share performance results on an ongoing basis.

# Sharing your progress

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As you begin to execute your strategic plan, you'll want to share your progress. A robust communication protocol reassures the council and stakeholders that their priorities are top of mind. It also motivates staff and managers, affirming that their hard work is paying off, and builds trust with the community, showing steady progress towards meaningful goals. Here are some techniques to consider.

## Tools for communicating internally

### Use a visual dashboard.

A performance management program with a visual dashboard lets you share strategic plan updates and KPIs openly and quickly. Everyone can work towards common goals with the same accurate information.

### Leverage existing meetings.

Ensure that the strategic plan is on the agenda of every monthly departmental meeting - and use this time to discuss progress on the plan.

### Performance evaluations and employee recognition programs.

Both are excellent opportunities to highlight how individual team members contribute to the big picture.

### Other regular communications.

Many organisations already have a regular employee newsletter or intranet. It's a simple way to add in a strategy update when there's news to share.



# Sharing your progress

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## Tools for communicating externally

### Make your dashboard public.

Showcase your public dashboards front and centre rather than burying the strategic plan on a forgotten corner of a website. It's an engaging way to communicate strategy updates and highlight the great work your teams are doing.

### Community forums.

When every member of the organisation is up-to-date on the strategic plan, they can promote your progress towards your KPIs during day-to-day interactions with the public.

### Annual reports and budget docs.

Take advantage of documents that you're already publishing to reinforce your strategic plan and the progress you've made.

### Social media and newsletters.

Use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and external newsletters to bring strategy updates to the public's inbox's and feeds.



# Evolving your living plan

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Remember that your strategic plan and action plans are living documents. Even once you are in execution mode, take the time to consider new developments that could affect your progress. Regularly refining and optimising your plan will keep you on track and relevant.



## **Look for Environmental Changes**

Set regular check-ins to look into your community and environment for any developments that might derail your plan. Relevant events in your community or region could include:

- Unexpected budget changes
- New regulations
- Health changes, e.g. Global Pandemics
- Unusual weather
- News or public events



## **Realign and Recommit**

When circumstances change, ask yourself whether the current strategy and initiatives are still valid. If not, make the necessary adjustments - and then recommit to execution. A plan that doesn't evolve can quickly become irrelevant.



## **Communicate Change**

If you need to change your strategy, move quickly to communicate to everyone involved. Your organisation needs to understand why the change was made and how it will affect them. Otherwise, they will still be spending valuable resources on outdated strategies or action plans that no longer align with the organisation's direction.



# Recognise and Share Success

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Congratulations - you've worked hard to create a well-designed action plan, you're firing on all cylinders, and sharing your progress internally and externally.

Now it's time to celebrate your success! Remember, if you're not stitching together the narrative, someone else is filling in the blanks.

## Why recognising success matters

It's more than just a smile across the room or a pat on the back - everyone likes to be acknowledged for the work they are achieving, and employees want to feel appreciated.

## Create a culture of celebration

Recognition needs to be baked into every part of the process and every level of the organisation. Celebrating wins doesn't just happen from the top down - it needs to be part of the culture and you can start with the small things:

- Encourage staff to do shout-outs for each other
- Publicly acknowledge staff, in person or in writing
- Surprise teams with donuts or coffee to acknowledge hard work

Sharing and celebrating success helps to create transparency - and transparency creates accountability which then builds trust. It's your obligation to celebrate when things go well. After all, if you don't reward good work, you simply won't get it.

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# Ready to turn Strategy into Action?

Implementing your strategic plan is no easy task - but it's incredibly worthwhile.

Envisio aligns people, plans, and performance data and helps local councils to develop and execute plans, track and improve performance, and communicate results.

At Redman Solutions, we understand the many unique challenges facing today's local government. That's why we connect people, processes, and technology to enable councils to be more transparent, effective, and accountable.

For almost two decades, we have been trusted by over 200 Local Government clients across Australia and New Zealand to transform the way they plan, meet, collaborate, and communicate with key stakeholders.

If you're looking to turn your strategic plans into action and provide visibility, transparency, and increased community engagement, get in touch.

