

How to Think about Strategic Planning



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Introduction

Welcome to the *How to Think about Strategic Planning* Training on Demand course.

This course is designed to provide you with information about what strategic planning is, how to prepare for planning sessions, and why strategic planning is important to your credit union's ability to remain relevant in the highly competitive and constantly changing financial services market. The planning process focuses on the credit union as a whole, enabling organizational leaders to set both service-based and financial-based goals.

There are a variety of strategic planning methods, each with a different perspective on how to consider your competition, your members, and your credit union's growth and development. This course provides an overview of the RESULTS method, including specific questions to ask and exercises to use during the planning process. It also provides basic information about preparing the site, the attendees, and yourself for a successful session.

Objectives

Strategic planning encompasses a broad set of goals for your credit union and it requires facilitation and understanding of the process—what it entails and how it affects your credit union.

The objectives for this course are to:

- Explain what a strategic plan is and why it is important;
- Understand how to facilitate planning retreats and exercises;

- Describe the steps involved in the RESULTS methodology of strategic planning;
- Discuss two other strategic planning models and list their key components; and
- Identify the benefits of engaging in regular strategic planning.

What Is a Strategic Plan?

The strategic planning process examines your credit union's potential for success within the financial services market and develops a future vision supported by current actions. This vision is the strategic plan and, in its simplest form, it is a set of decisions about what to do, how to do it, and why to do it. A strategic plan focuses on all aspects of the credit union—not just the financial aspects—and establishes goals related to member needs and wants, operational marketing, product offerings, and technology changes. Each of these goals is supported by a specific set of actions for achieving it.



The strategic plan also includes a structure and timeline for regular monitoring of your credit union's progress toward its goals. This is a key component of the plan because it makes credit union staff, managers, and board members accountable for goal achievement. It also ensures that goals are regularly assessed and realistic adjustments are made as needed during the course of plan implementation. Let's take a closer look at the interactions between goals, actions, timelines, and assessments in a strategic plan.

Why Is Strategic Planning Important?

Strategic planning is important because it leads to prioritization of goals. In other words, it helps you determine which decisions are most important to the success of your credit union.

Developing a strategic plan requires you to objectively assess the opportunities and threats of the financial services market, and the strengths and weaknesses of your credit union. It forces you to consider how each strength or weakness can be improved upon and to examine how different groups can contribute to these improvements. Strategic planning rallies staff, managers, and board members behind a single, exciting mission for the future that reinforces what your credit union is and why it exists.

Facilitating Strategic Planning

Creating a successful strategic plan starts with adequate preparation for the planning session. Finalization of participants, dates, locations, and session leadership are key to a successful process. Include all board and executive management team members, and hold the meeting several weeks after any regularly scheduled executive or board meetings. This helps participants focus on the planning task at hand and avoid conversations about outstanding meeting issues.

Hold the session away from your credit union at a conference facility or hotel with meeting capabilities. Placing participants in a neutral environment reduces the number of normal business interruptions.

