

# Hints and tips for how to develop a strategy for political finance oversight institutions

## Preparation stage

- Start at least a year before publication.
- The Board leads on strategy development (staff lead on business and operational planning).
- Preliminary planning for workshop with the Board:
  - Have a private discussion first with the Chair to agree the format and discover their expectations of a strategy workshop. Do they want to play a role, or will they leave it to you to facilitate the session?
  - Undertake an initial environmental analysis – what’s going on around you? What’s coming up?

## Start Up stage

- Workshop development
  - If possible, hold the workshop somewhere other than your office. You want them to think about future possibilities, not current preoccupations.
  - Visioning session – What’s their dream? How do they want the world to be?
  - Undertake an environmental analysis as a group.
  - Allow them to discuss some of the activities that could create this vision (this will inevitably form part of the conversation), but keep them from devolving into operational details about one or two pet subjects – remind them they need to be taking a helicopter view at this moment, since all the planning will come at a much later stage. Keep them focused on articulating a vision.
  - Keep notes somewhere they can see them throughout the session, either on flipchart pages or on a projected laptop screen.
  - Summarise for them towards the end – what topics have they focused on the most, and what are you hearing from them that is visionary? What have they seemed the most excited about? Allow some discussion.
- Seek external input and challenge
  - At some point in the process, it is worthwhile obtaining external feedback to avoid 'groupthink' and ensure that the organisation's perspective is aligned with the perspectives of relevant others. For example, as part of the environmental analysis, you may want to consider having some external presentations and/or external facilitators working with the Board.
  - When to do this in the process can be difficult to determine. If you leave it too late, you may have already become attached to the ideas developed and thus be less open to

suggestions. If you seek input too early, there is a risk the strategy will reflect more the views of others and you may feel less ownership of it.

- Don't let budget get in the way of the ambition
  - Identify the vision first of all, and then work out how you might realistically bring it about, over what time period, and at what cost.
  - If you start by constraining the vision to current resources only, you may accidentally exclude the best ideas; and overlook ways in which you could potentially increase your resources. A strong and powerful vision may influence funders to increase your resources.
  - Once you have identified the vision, you will need to consider the resource implications of delivering it; the two are inextricably linked.
  - Advise the Board that it is best to set the duration of the strategy a little later, once you have more of a sense of how long it will take to deliver. Typical timescales would be three, four or five years, but don't commit too early.
- Agree with the Board how you will then formulate, edit and agree your strategy.
  - It may be useful to ask one or two members to act as an informal sounding board during the drafting phase.
  - Agree with the Chair an overall timeline for approving a draft, consulting on it, and then finalising and publishing the strategy. Ensure that the time allowed for commenting/responding is adequate – try not to make deadlines too short. Also consider the most effective means of communicating drafts and capturing comments – this may be online, paper-based and/or face-to-face (and different consultees may prefer different communication methods).
  - Consider whether you will need some design input into your strategy so that the document looks professional and polished. It's going to be the organisation's most important document, and you will want to be proud of it.
  - Also give some early thought to how you should launch your strategy – for example you may want to plan a launch event, or tie the strategy launch into a pre-existing occasion.
- Agree with your Board how, and who, you will consult on your strategy.
  - This could be via stakeholder meetings, a simple survey, or publishing a draft for comment on your website.
  - Think about how widely you need to consult, and whether there are key organisations or individuals who you want to focus on more so that they have particular input.

## Development Stage

- Produce a basic first draft of your strategy to play back to the Board.
  - Try to condense their visioning session into a one-sentence vision statement – this may not survive the first draft, but it will help you to have better discussions.

- A vision statement should be short and memorable and should not be a list of everyone's wants. A maximum of ten words is strongly advised. Try to steer the Board away from writing it 'by committee' – it won't be pithy or focused enough. It should be short and inspirational.
- If you also have a general mission statement, stating how the organisation generally works to fulfil its aims, you may want to include that; or you may want to write a new mission statement to support your vision, saying in one sentence how you will bring the vision about.
- Include a summary of the environmental analysis you conducted (doing this in conversational prose is usually more effective – 'we looked around and we saw x, and we realised y, and so we agreed to focus on z... we want to see a world where...'.)
- Outline the medium to long-term objectives (no more than six) that you identified from the initial workshop discussion, and think about whether that set of objectives will, in total, deliver the vision. There may be gaps or overlaps, so the objectives may need further work.
- Do not try to write about measures of success at this stage – do that once the vision and objectives are firmer. You are likely to go through three or four drafts.
- Ensure that your strategy is not too lengthy. If it is, you are probably including too much operational detail – the place for that is your business plan. Five or six pages for the entire strategy will be sufficient if you have pitched it at a high enough level. Annexes that make the document longer should be avoided – extra contextual information can always be provided elsewhere, for example on your website.
- Share your initial draft with senior managers and your most senior decision-maker before disseminating it more widely, and take in any edits that result from their comments. If there is disagreement at this stage, arrange a meeting so you have everyone together in one room to discuss refining the draft.
- Take the draft strategy formally to your full Board for their input.
  - They are likely to have more ideas, or to have reflected on the workshop and developed a different view about some things at this stage, so be prepared for that and take it in your stride.
  - Make sure you get agreement about next steps before the end of the item. For instance, if your next step is consultation, you need to know whether they would like to see another draft before you proceed.
- Once there is a draft everyone is happy to consult on, proceed with your agreed consultation plan.
  - Keep track of all the feedback so it can be fed back to the Board at its next formal meeting (or you may arrange a second workshop if they would prefer a more informal discussion).
  - Don't forget to consult your staff – they often have great insights and ideas and will certainly be interested since the new strategy will shape their work for the next few years.

- Create a new draft for the Board (you may have to do this several times before obtaining final approval). Write a covering paper summarising all the consultation feedback and stating how you have addressed the main points in the new draft.
  - At this stage, if you have not already done so, agree the duration of your strategy – typically three, four or five years.
  - This is also the time to consider measures of success. How will you know when each objective has been reached? How will you know when the overall vision has been achieved?
- As the draft becomes closer to final, you should share it with your staff – especially those responsible for business and operational planning.
  - It's important that the high level, long term objectives in the strategy are in fact deliverable – you need to do some staff-side planning in order to provide a reality check and assurance for the Board, before they sign off on the final strategy.
  - Think about each strategic objective. These can probably each be broken down into several smaller, shorter term objectives. When (in which business year) should you tackle each one? What sorts of activities and projects will be entailed? Are they small, medium or large in terms of the capacity needed? Do you already have the right skills for those pieces of work?

## Finalisation Stage

- When you are confident that the document is near-final and has been reality tested adequately, submit it to any external body, if any, that must agree it. This may be the legislature, or one of its committees (e.g., The Speaker's Committee in United Kingdom). Once that step is completed, you are ready to take a final paper to a Board meeting, inviting them to sign off the document ready for any final design work prior to launch and publication.
- Prepare for your launch event and publication.
  - Continue the process of engaging with your staff and ensuring they are using the new strategy when forming their plans for the following year. Promote awareness of the vision and the strategic objectives.
  - Remember to send copies (or links) to all of your stakeholders on launch, especially those who gave up their time to contribute to it via stakeholder meetings, filling in consultation surveys, etc.

After publication, continue to use and refer to your strategy frequently. Ensure your activities, plans and budgets are well aligned with it, and that you review progress regularly. Your Board should have a regular opportunity (at least annually) to review progress to date towards its aims and success measures.