IMPLEMENTING AND SUSTAINING YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN

A WORKBOOK FOR PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

JOHN M. BRYSON

SHARON ROE ANDERSON

FARNUM K. ALSTON

Implementing and Sustaining Your Strategic Plan

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A Workbook for Public and Nonprofit Organizations

John M. Bryson, Sharon Roe Anderson, and Farnum K. Alston

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Preface

Strategic planning is "a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it" (Bryson, 2011). Strategic planning is now standard practice for a substantial majority of public and nonprofit organizations. But only those organizations that successfully implement their plans fulfill their missions, meet their mandates, and create significant and lasting public value. *Implementation*, in other words, is "the effort to realize in practice an organization's mission, goals and strategies, the meeting of its mandates, continued organizational learning, and the ongoing creation of public value" (Bryson, 2010). Implementation is thus more time consuming and resource intensive than strategic planning. Indeed, most organizations spend most of their time implementing their strategies, not coming up with new ones, and that is as it should be. That ongoing work of making things happen and satisfying key stakeholders is the *busy-ness* from which business—whether corporate, government, or nonprofit—gets its name.

But strategic planning and implementation do overlap—and necessarily so—in significant ways. For example, strategic planning should be informed by what has worked and not worked for the organization in the past, and plans should always be developed with implementation in mind. *Implementing and Sustaining Your Strategic Plan* is designed to help practitioners ensure that the hopes and dreams embodied in strategic plans are realized in the nitty-gritty world of implementation. The workbook is thus a companion not only to *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, fourth edition (Bryson, 2011), which over the course of its four editions has helped to make strategic planning a conventional feature of management practice, but also to *Creating Your Strategic Plan* (Bryson & Alston, 2011), a companion workbook focused on plan creation, now in its third edition. A new workbook is needed both because implementation is a big enough task that it deserves its own workbook and because the implementers of strategic plans are often not the same people as the strategic planners.

The basic approach to implementation outlined in *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* has proven as useful today as when the book was first published. However, the field has changed as the world of theory and practice has evolved. The latest edition of that book and both workbooks embody much of what has been learned by scholars and practitioners and by the authors' own practice.

Why has strategic planning become standard practice for most public and nonprofit organizations? There are a variety of reasons. First, many public organizations are now required by law to conduct strategic planning, and many nonprofit organizations are required to do so by their funders. Second, strategic planning is now seen as a mark of good professional practice, so organizations pursue it to enhance their legitimacy and standing in the eyes of external audiences. And many organizations simply copy what everyone else is doing. But we believe the most important reason strategic planning is so widely used is that public and nonprofit leaders find that it can help them think, act, and learn strategically—precisely what is required as these leaders grasp the challenges their organizations face, figure out what to do about them, and follow through with effective implementation.

Strategic planning is thus a crucial component of *strategic management*, defined as "the integration of strategic planning and implementation across an organization (or other entity) in an ongoing way to enhance the fulfillment of mission, meeting of mandates, and sustained creation of public value" (Bryson, 2010). Taking a strategic management approach that links strategic planning with effective implementation is a must if these organizations are to compete, survive, and prosper; meet their legal, ethical, professional, organizational, community, and public service obligations successfully; and create significant and lasting public value and advance the common good. The basic logic of strategic management is presented in Figure 1. It involves creating public value, meeting mandates, and fulfilling one's mission via effective implementation of new and ongoing strategies—and exiting as gracefully as possible from the doing of low-priority or ineffective things. Figuring out which strategies to keep, which to add, and which to drop is the job of strategic planning.

Implementing and Sustaining Your Strategic Plan is meant to serve several purposes.

- It is designed to help public and nonprofit organizations (or collaborations or communities) as they build and deploy needed capacities to successfully implement their strategic plans and align themselves to produce continuous learning and long-lasting public value.
- It provides a conceptual framework, vocabulary, step-by-step approach, adaptable worksheets, and supplemental resource materials that allow users to custom design their implementation strategies to meet their unique needs over the life of their strategic plan.

FIGURE 1

The Basic Logic of Strategic Management

- It is meant to be a resource throughout the time frame of the organization's strategic plan—these days that is usually three to five years at most. During this time, plan and strategy refinement and reassessment will typically occur on a regular basis, and it is not unusual for new strategic plans to be developed before the three- to five-year period is up.

This workbook's conceptual framework, step-by-step process, and worksheets can be used in a variety of ways. For example:

- The workbook as a whole or selected parts of it can be used by elected or appointed policy boards, boards of directors, senior management teams, implementation teams, and task forces on a regular basis throughout the process of sustained implementation (for example, it could be part of regularly scheduled meetings).
- The workbook's parts can also be used with strategy-specific workgroups at various points in an implementation process.

- Individual worksheets or combinations of worksheets can be used to address a variety of implementation-related tasks on an as-needed basis. These tasks include

  Clarifying desired implementation outcomes and the time frames and action steps necessary to achieve them

  Attending to the full array of guidance, control, and performance management approaches necessary to ensure that needed implementation successes and ongoing learning occur (Simons, 1995)

  Building ownership with stakeholders so they know and own the plan and can engage in continuous implementation via achievement of short-term milestones

  Making goal achievement a part of the organization's daily way of working and a prominent feature of its culture, rather than seeing implementation as just dealing with annoying add-on projects

  Building in the forums needed to foster a habit of dialogue and inquiry and the real learning that results from such forums

  Relying on appropriate decision-making methods, including collective decision making when appropriate

  Organizing and providing necessary resources to teams as major implementation vehicles

  Fostering leadership, professional, and ongoing organizational development as a part of the implementation process

  Attending to functions and operations that may not be highlighted in the strategic plan

  Identifying, building, and maintaining needed core organizational competencies

  Clarifying where formative and summative evaluation processes of key implementation elements should occur and what their main focus should be

  Preparing for the next round of strategic planning

- Finally, the workbook can be used as part of for-credit courses and noncredit professional development programs focused on strategic planning, strategic management, or implementation.

This workbook addresses key issues in the design of an overall implementation process. Although it touches on some of the same issues that are important in strategic planning, it does so only where implementation and strategic planning issues clearly overlap. We therefore recommend that this workbook be used in

tandem with the fourth edition of *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (Bryson, 2011); the information in that book will place the workbook's guidance and worksheets in a broader context, provide information on other significant issues, review relevant details, and alert users to important caveats. We also recommend that organizations use this workbook in tandem with the third edition of the workbook *Creating Your Strategic Plan* (Bryson & Alston, 2011), so that planning and implementation can be more seamlessly pursued. Furthermore, we emphasize that this workbook is not a substitute for the internal or external professional consultation and facilitation services that are often needed during a strategy implementation effort. The implementation process is both important enough and difficult enough that having support from someone who has "been there and done that"—and who thinks wisely and reflectively about the process—may make the difference between a successful, high-value effort and one that stalls or fails or, even though completed, does not produce much of value.

Audience

This workbook is intended mostly for leaders, board members, elected officials, managers, planners, employees, and other stakeholders of public and nonprofit organizations and communities. Businesses may also find the workbook useful if their organizations have a direct business relationship with public or nonprofit organizations or if they find the approach generally applicable to their organizations. The audience for this workbook therefore includes

People interested in understanding more about strategy implementation for their public and nonprofit organizations, collaborations, or communities

Sponsors, champions, and funders of strategy implementation processes

Portfolio, program, and project managers charged with overseeing important aspects of implementing strategic plans

Implementation teams and task forces

Implementation consultants and process facilitators

Teachers and students of strategic management

Where This Workbook Will Be Relevant

This workbook is designed to be of use to a variety of people and groups:

Public and nonprofit organizations as whole entities (rather than their parts)