



Baptist Churches
of NSW & ACT

Developing and Implementing a Strategic Plan

1. What is a strategic plan and why is it important?

A strategic plan is simply a series of goals, and the order in which they will be undertaken, to help a church get from where it is to where it believes God would have it be.

It is important because:

- Without it...a vision may seem too big and unachievable.
 - A strategic plan breaks a vision down into key steps that enable it to be achieved.
- Without it...a congregation may be diverted by things that are not relevant to the vision.
 - A strategic plan will guide day to day decisions and the formulation of the annual budget.
 - It is a lens for the analysis of possible new initiatives, helping to highlight any that do not serve the vision.
- Without it...there is no substantive reference point for the evaluation of progress.
 - A strategic plan will help with the measurement of forward movement. In so doing it will help identify when the plan itself may need to be adapted.

One could think of it in terms of planning a road trip. Someone making a long car journey may break the trip into more manageable sections. They will identify places to stop for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and any overnight stays. Doing this allows them to rest, eat and refuel the car. The plan may even include dropping in on friends en route. The goal, of course, is to reach the destination, but this is achieved with the help of a set of more manageable objectives.

One could also think of it like a boat tacking in the wind. When a boat tries to sail to a certain point it is unable to do that in a straight line if the wind is blowing against it. So, the method it uses is to tack from one point to another, zig zagging its way forward. This series of small steps allows it to negotiate the wind and reach its destination. It was with this analogy in mind that someone said, "The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects the wind to change. Good leadership adjusts the sails". A strategic plan is a way of "adjusting the sails". It is good leadership to work to such a plan.

2. What are the vital components of a strategic plan?

No single strategic plan fits all churches, or all contexts, but when composing one the following are important to consider:

a) Context Matters

Given that a strategic plan is a tool that helps a church get from where it is to where it believes God would have it be, a church must first understand “where it is”. To this end it should conduct a realistic assessment of:

- **Its current demography.**

Who is the church?

How many people are there?

What is the spread of ages?

What is the ethnic mix?

How long have people been members of the congregation?

What first attracted people to the church?

What do people value most about the church as it currently is?

What church ministries are people involved in?

What is the level of involvement in the wider Christian sphere?

What is the level of involvement in the wider community?

Etc.

Such an assessment can be carried out using a simple survey

- **Its current practical resources.**

What assets and resources are currently available to the church?

What about its people?

What are their academic and professional qualifications?

What are their work backgrounds?

What are their natural talents and spiritual gifts?

What are their interests and passions – both Christian and not?

What is people’s current availability, in terms of their time?

What about its finances?

What savings and investments does it have?

How has weekly giving been tracking?

Is this a realistic reflection of its people’s capacity to give?

What about its land and property?

What facilities are available to it?

What is the condition of any property it has?

Is there opportunity to leverage off existing assets?

An assessment of its people resources can be carried out using a survey
 An assessment of its financial resources can be carried out by its treasurer and/or others with a background in finance
 An assessment of its property can be carried out with the help of a surveyor and/or architect and may include the development of a Property Masterplan to complement the Strategic Plan.

- **The demography of its wider community.**

Who lives in its neighbourhood?

What is the current, social, cultural and economic profile?

How has this changed over recent years?

How is it projected to change in the future?

This can be carried out by analysing the relevant Census data and/or purchasing a report from NCLS

- **The demography of the wider Christian community.**

What other churches and Christian organisations operate in the local neighbourhood?

What services and activities do they offer?

What partnerships, if any, currently exist?

What has God been doing, and what is He doing, in this wider Christian sphere?

b) Purpose, Values & Vision Matter

Given that a strategic plan is a tool that helps a church get from where it is to where it believes God would have it be then having understood where it currently is, a congregation must then come to a clear consensus around where it believes God would have it be. To this end, it will be helpful for a congregation to have a widely shared understanding of the church's purpose, values and vision.

- What is a Purpose Statement?

A Purpose Statement explains why the church exists.

A good Purpose Statement is usually short and sharp. It clearly encapsulates what the church does in as few words as possible. It is easy to understand and memorable.

If a church has not already done so, then a process to agree a Purpose Statement should be undertaken.

A congregation needs to be clear about its collective purpose, and supportive of it, in order for the church to get from where it is to where God would have it be, and a good strategic plan will be clearly relevant to that purpose.

- What are "Values" and why are they significant?

Values are those things that a congregation treasure.

Values are significant because they represent what is important to a congregation and will influence how people behave, how things are done and what people support.

If a church has not already done so, then an exercise to identify its key values should be undertaken. If it has identified its values, then these should be revisited to underline them in the thinking of the church.

Values inspire people to action and so are more easily leveraged.

A good strategic plan will be clearly related to a church's values. If this is so, then there is a greater likelihood that people will embrace its priorities and work towards their achievement. It will help people to engage emotionally with the plan.

- What is a Vision Statement and why is it significant?

A Vision Statement is a picture, painted with words, of what a church will look like if it is fulfilling its Purpose Statement. It is usually longer and more descriptive than a Purpose Statement. It is significant because it helps a

congregation see where God is leading them.

A well written Vision Statement can captivate people's hearts and inspire them to make the journey and a good strategic plan is framed in such a way that it helps a church make concrete progress towards the realization of its vision.

Many vision statements also include vision pictures, which break the vision down into bite-sized pieces, which together make up the whole meal.

c) A good Strategic Plan is S.M.A.R.T

A good strategic plan will break the “journey” towards achieving the Vision into attainable legs by outlining:

- the strategic priorities for the period of the plan
- key objectives/ministry initiatives – what is the plan seeking to achieve?
- key enablers – which people and resources will be important to achieving the objectives/ministry initiatives?
- key accountabilities – who will “run point” on each and who will assess their progress?

The objectives contained within a strategic plan are usually Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-specific (S.M.A.R.T).

- **A good strategic plan will be Specific**

It will clearly describe:

- Objectives/ministry initiatives
- how these relate to the priorities
- the key accountabilities
- what enablers will be required

- **A good strategic plan will be Measurable**

It will allow those managing it (usually the key governance group) to evaluate progress.

- **A good strategic plan will be Achievable**

While it may well be ambitious, it will not be unrealistic!

- **A good strategic plan will be Relevant to the Vision**

It will help the church towards fulfilling its Vision rather than distracting from it.

- **A good strategic plan will be Time specific**

It will cover a set period - 3 years is a good timespan for a church’s strategic plan.

It may also include timeframes for the key objectives/ministry initiatives.

It may prioritise objectives, so denoting the order in which they are to be undertaken.

It may well form part of a series of strategic plans that eventually result in the realisation of the Vision/ Vision Pictures.

d) A good Strategic Plan is Well-Weighted

A good strategic plan will hold in tension the maintenance and development of a church's core ministry with the nurturing of emerging ministry and the generation of genuinely new ministry. A good guide is:

70% of the plan is given to maintaining and developing core ministry

20% of the plan is given to nurturing emerging ministry

10% of the plan is given to generating genuinely new ministry

3. What are the key steps necessary for developing and implementing a strategic plan?

Step 1

Conduct a comprehensive audit of the current context including the church's own demography, its current assets and resources, the demography of the local community, and that of the wider Christian community

Step 2

Clarify, and if necessary, review or develop, a Purpose Statement, Values Statement, and Vision Statement

Step 3

Create a three-years strategic plan, that enunciates key priorities, sets out a range of S.M.A.R.T objectives, and identifies relevant accountabilities and enablers.

Step 4

Publish the strategic plan for discussion and adoption by the church

Step 5

Include the strategic plan as a recurring agenda item at Leadership Team meetings so that progress is subject to regular review

Step 6

Hold an annual half-day retreat to evaluate progress in more detail, adapt where necessary, and discuss the next strategic plan!