



E-Weekly Newsletter

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**Champion REAP
Alliance**
Laura Every, Director
PO Box 324
Maddock, ND 58348

Phone:
(701) 438-2660

Fax:
(701) 438-2283

E-mail:
levery@gondtc.com

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www.ndalliancelink.com



Something to Think About...

Forget strategic planning. Today's successful boards engage in strategic thinking.

By Frederick T. Miller

While many organizations engage in strategic planning, the result is often inadequately strategic. If the purpose is to give attention to the future and to develop and align the organization to pursue its vision and mission, the results are clearly mixed. Too often planning stops short of a result that embarks on a clear. Strategic course of action or shifts the mental model of the organization's leaders.

But some organizations work at being truly strategic. While their planning processes may vary, they are clear about their core beliefs. They continuously rather than episodically - focus their energy on questions that lead to strategic thinking and action.

CORE IDEOLOGY

These boards and professional leaders know what they stand for. They use their core ideology as a way to noodle through tough questions, issues, and uncertain opportunities.

One organization I worked with, for example, developed over decades a comprehensive, year-round intervention that made a demonstrable outcome in the lives of children and adolescents. When the philanthropic arm of a national corporation began looking for ways to accomplish the same goals, they discovered this organization and proposed taking it to scale. In essence, they created a joint venture tied to the corporation's name, licensed the approach, and engaged the organization as the knowledge experts for replication.

The decisions were significant - a multiyear contractual arrangement, a shift in identity, and a chance to accomplish their dreams. A year prior, the board and management had laboriously worked through what they really believed in and what they envisioned as their potential. There was no way they could have anticipated this opportunity and its complexity. But because they were clear about what was really important, and had considered a range of scenarios, the board navigated the decision process.

There is a risk, however, that boards will confuse core beliefs with rituals, symbols, practices, and programs. Leadership expert Ron Heifetz suggests that strategy begins by asking "which stakeholders have to adjust their ways to make progress [on this problem]" and that the challenge for leaders is to "diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face."

Core ideology is always at risk of hardening into "sacred cows" - programs that can't be adapted as realities change. When this occurs, the organization's leaders may become reluctant to engage in the probing questions that are needed to retain their strategic edge. But it's essential for vibrancy and mission relevance.

TAKE OFF THE BLINDERS

Strategically thinking boards and executives assume, as consultant Tom McLaughlin says, that "circumstances are going to change, probably in unimaginable ways, and the

agency's strategic thinking must take this into account." They allocate time in board meetings, committees, and retreats to key questions and consideration of change in their environment and within the organization. They ask

- What are we doing well? Why? Would more investment increase impact?
- What is not working so well? Why? What are the barriers? What would it take to resolve and achieve greater impact?
- What are the drivers of change?
- What's changed or is anticipated to change? What are the implications for strategy (vs. operating or business plan)?

Other boards focus on major issues and trends and regularly ask: What are the mega issues and driving forces that are impacting us?

Some organizations engage in scenario planning- a strategic thinking process developed by Peter Schwartz, president of the Global Business Network. Driven by key questions, scenario planning assumes multiple futures are possible. It helps boards and executives think about who they are at their core. Then they can devise a strategy to pursue futures that can be anticipated - but not predicted. A number of nonprofit organizations are using elements of scenario planning at board retreats, sometimes involving others who enrich the discussion with alternative views.

Strategically thinking boards and executives focus on questions, consider alternative scenarios, are comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, and use much of their time together for collaborative thinking. The result is a thinking and learning process, characterized by a strong commitment to core beliefs and a capacity to grow, adapt, and act strategically.

Frederick T. Miller is a consultant focusing in governance, strategy, and organizational effectiveness. He is president of The Chatham Group, Inc, and a senior associate with BoardSource.

Resource:

Driving Strategic Planning: A Nonprofit Executive's Guide by Deborah L. Kocsis and Susan A. Waechter. BoardSource, 2003.

Alliance Annual Review Meeting Set

The Champion REAP Alliance will meet on October 1st and 2nd for an annual review of the strategic plan. The meeting will be held at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Washburn. Along with the planning meeting, David Beurele from the Innovative Leadership Australia project has been invited to speak to the board and invited guests.

The agenda for this two day event:

- October 1- Noon – 2:00 PM Alliance Board review of past accomplishments
- 2:00 PM –5:00 PM Innovative Leadership Australia presentation by David Beurele
- October 2- 9:00 AM – Noon Champion Alliance Planning Meeting facilitated by Kathy Tweeten, NDSU-Extension

Funding Opportunities

Improving the World Through Gardening

[Gardener's Supply Donation Program](#)

The Gardener's Supply Donation Program provides cash or products to nonprofit organizations

throughout the United States. The company's support focuses on gardening, sustainable agriculture, food, environment, and hunger. There are no application deadlines; requests are reviewed quarterly. Please either mail or fax your request. For more information, visit the above website.

Support for Disabled Veterans

[Disabled American Veterans Charitable Service Trust](#)

Building better lives for our nation's disabled veterans and their families is the primary goal of the Disabled American Veterans Charitable Service Trust. To carry out this responsibility, the Trust provides support to a wide range of services including physical and psychological rehabilitation programs, shelters for homeless veterans, and counseling and job training programs. Priority is given to long-term service programs providing direct assistance to disabled veterans and their families. Applications are accepted four times a year. The deadlines are: January 31, May 1, August 1, and November 1. For more information, visit the above website.

Fellowships for Environmental Leaders

[Environmental Leadership Program](#)

The Environmental Leadership Program seeks to transform public understanding of environmental issues by training and supporting a diverse network of visionary, action-oriented emerging leaders. ELP's Fellowship Program provides training and project support to 20-25 talented and diverse individuals each year from nonprofit organizations, business, government, and higher education. The two-year ELP Fellowship offers unique networking opportunities, intensive leadership and skills training, the opportunity to meet established environmental practitioners and experts in the field, and time for personal and professional reflection. Fellows receive travel and accommodations for four fellowship retreats, access to funding for capacity-building leadership projects, and national recognition through the program. In their first year, fellows are given the opportunity to request grants from the ELP Activity Fund, which provides up to \$10,000 per participant to support leadership-building activities and individual and collaborative projects. The deadline for applications is October 1, annually. For more information, visit the above website.

Funds for Native Food Systems Projects

[First Nations Development: Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative](#)

The Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative, a special initiative of First Nations' Eagle Staff Fund, addresses issues confronting tribes and Native communities as they seek to strengthen the food system in their communities, improve health and nutrition, and build food security. The current funding focus is on three specific areas of priority: 1) local community food systems projects, with emphasis on projects that cultivate market opportunities for local producers; 2) agriculture-related business enterprises, including any Native business enterprises that seek to use local resources for the supply of agricultural products; and 3) community connections around culture, food, diet and health, including projects that address diet, nutrition and other health related issues. Successful projects should draw upon traditional knowledge in the local community, build relationships between youth and elders, and explore traditional approaches to food and agriculture. The deadline for letters of intent is September 30, 2003. For more information visit the First Nations website and click on the "Request for LOIs" section on the left-hand side bar of the home page.

In Need of News/Updates

I am in need of news to share in my weekly emails and to post on the ndalliancelink.com website. E-mail me at levery@gondtc.com

Upcoming Meetings/Events

- ✓ September 9th CONAC Board Meeting in Anamoose
- ✓ September 16th SW REAP Meeting in Dickinson
- ✓ October 1st Champion Alliance Strategic Plan Review in Washburn
- ✓ October 2st Champion Alliance monthly meeting in Washburn

Upcoming Training Opportunities

September

- 8- Financing: NDSCS Tech Center in Wahpeton
- 11- Checklist for Starting a Business: Griggs-Steele EZ in Finley
- 15- Credit & Collections: Traill Co Tech Center in Mayville
- 18- Checklist for Starting a Business: City Hall in Harvey
- 25- Credit & Collections: Business Resource Center in Fargo

Current and Ongoing Projects

- ✓ NDalliancelink.com maintenance and updating
- ✓ Alliance Board Strategic Plan Update
- ✓ Alliance Link Newsletter (December 2003)
- ✓ Sirolli Institute Demonstration Project
- ✓ ND Leadership Capacity Building in Designated Areas