

SECURING THE MISSION THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING

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When considering how to address the theme of this conference – universities in transition – I wanted to address a very practical issue that would be of interest to and useful for any type and size of institution challenged by change. At around the same time that proposals for this conference were due, the museum in which I work was in the process completing the annual review of its strategic planning priorities and goals. I was struck by what a useful process it is, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed, and as I read more about the rather beautifully simple theory underlying the practice of strategic planning I realized that I had found the subject for this presentation. Later, I discovered UMAC is itself undertaking strategic planning and so my hope is that these remarks will be useful for this organization, too. Since I only have 15 minutes I had to strategically plan what I am going to say, so my aim this morning is discuss the value of strategic planning as a tool to help museums meet their mission with limited resources and remain focused on the mission in times of change. I'll begin with a brief synopsis of the strategic planning process, illustrate how this process is used at the Museum of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas, USA, and explain how this process helps the Museum to secure its mission.

The Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* gleefully states that if you don't know where you're going, it doesn't matter which way you go. While he most assuredly was not talking about strategic planning, a lack of direction is symptomatic of an institution without a mission and vision or a plan to get from the former to the latter. An effective way to find institutional direction is through strategic planning.

Much information on strategic planning is freely and easily available. An Internet search produces websites with articles addressing everything from the definition of strategic planning to how to produce an individually tailored plan. Two particularly

useful websites in English are the Alliance for Non-Profit Management at www.allianceonline.org and the Free Management Library at www.managementhelp.org. The following remarks are based on information found in these two sources and they can be accessed directly for more detail.

Strategic planning is, simply, a management tool. It is used for one purpose only and that is to help an institution do a better job. It does this by making an institution focus its direction, define agreed-upon goals, and assess and adjust direction in response to change. Strategic planning is a conscious effort to produce decisions and actions that shape and guide what an institution is, what it does, and why it does it, all with a focus on the future. It involves setting goals and developing an approach to achieving those goals. The strategic planning process also raises questions that help planners anticipate the environment in which the institution will be working in the future. (Adapted from Bryson's Strategic Planning in Public and Nonprofit Organizations). Acting strategically means being clear about institutional objectives, knowing institutional resources, and considering both when responding to a changing environment.

Strategic planning is only useful if it is translated into strategic management. Strategic management requires an institution to formulate a mission and a vision for the future, develop a strategy to achieve the mission and vision, and create an institutional structure to successfully carry out the strategy. Although strategic planning is focused on the future, it does not attempt to make decisions for the future. Strategic planning thus is dynamic and requires periodic evaluation and revision.

There are many models for how to actually carry out strategic planning and recommendations on the details vary widely. Whatever model is used, there are some fundamental steps that must be taken. These are: preparation for planning; stating mission and vision; assessing the current institutional situation; developing strategies, goals, and objectives; and completing the written plan.

Any process that takes much time, thought, and preparation can seem to be a daunting task in the face of busy schedules and ongoing daily activities, especially when it determines the future course for an institution. However, the benefits of planning far outweigh the difficulties. The process of planning itself has the effect of educating and empowering those individuals involved in the process. The end product of the process, the planning document, is a tool that can be used to effectively and efficiently manage the institution. For university museums, benefits from the planning process and the development of the final plan include a framework and a clearly defined direction that guides and supports the governance and management of the organization, improved quality of services and a means of measuring the services, the ability to set priorities and to match resources to opportunities, and the ability to deal with risks from the external environment.

Established in 1923, Texas Tech University today maintains the flexibility and diversity that were embodied in the institution from the time of its founding by offering a combination of academic choices from the traditional degree programs to interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, and vocational options. To support this interdisciplinary research, some sixty specialized research centers and institutes are located at Texas Tech. These include the Museum of Texas Tech University.

The Museum is an educational, scientific, cultural, and research element of Texas Tech. Its mission states that the Museum of Texas Tech University, as an education resource for a diverse audience, collects, researches, and disseminates information about the natural and cultural heritage of local and related regions. The stated purpose of the Museum is to support the academic and intellectual mission of Texas Tech University through the collection, preservation, documentation, and research of scientific and cultural material, and to disseminate information about those collections and their

scientific and cultural topics through exhibition, interpretation, and publication for primary, secondary, and higher education students, the scholarly community, and the general public.

A Texas Tech University Operating Policy and Procedure relating to strategic planning and assessments mandates that all areas and units of the University have a strategic plan, and participate in annual assessment of the plan. The University-wide strategic planning process began in the 2000-2001 academic year and plans were completed in 2002, so use of strategic planning still is relatively new. The OP directs all areas and units to use the assessment reports to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their programs and operations. Furthermore, University administrators are directed to use the planning and assessments in decision-making and budget allocations, so there is a very real incentive for use of the strategic plan to guide effective management and improve performance.

The Museum is an operating unit of Texas Tech University. In order to support the academic and intellectual mission of the University, the Museum's mission reflects that of its parent in its focus on the advancement of knowledge and service to humankind. However, the method by which the Museum meets its mission through collecting, researching and disseminating information is recognizable as that of a traditional museum approach. The Museum's stated five-part vision is that it: will be a leading university museum in the nation; will provide leadership in professional museum practices; will be a research-intensive institution where faculty, staff, and student investigation enhances learning and provides a foundation for intellectual growth and achievement; will promote the values of social and intellectual exchange and understanding and; will engage in the highest standards of museological practice. Echoes of the University's vision are heard in the Museum's desire to obtain national recognition and the advancement of knowledge through research, but practicing

highest standards of generating, preserving, and using museum collections as the means to achieve this make the vision uniquely that of a museum.

The format of the Museum's strategic plan is prescribed by guidelines from the Strategic Planning Council through the Office of the President of Texas Tech University. Every area and unit strategic plan must include a mission statement, a vision statement, and a number of goals that are supported by critical success factors and objectives. The critical success factors must be stated to allow each area or unit to evaluate its measure of success in meeting its goals over the next five years. The objectives must be supported by specific strategies designed to allow the objectives to be realized, and by assessments that allow the success of the strategies to be measured so that progress can be demonstrated. Use of such a hierarchical system allows the plan to organize information in such a way that it can be clearly understood and utilized. Only when information is used to inform action will the plan be effective.

As a result of working through the strategic planning process that is described in the earlier part of this presentation, and by following the University's guidelines, the Museum now has a strategic plan that has identified five specific goals that it must accomplish. These goals are carefully selected and stated because they directly support the Museum's mission. Goal One addresses institutional advancement, specifically to acquire and maintain quality collections that meet the mission and vision of the institution. Goal Four addresses programmatic advancement, specifically to increase public and academic educational programming by creating new programs and enhancing existing programs. Both of these goals obviously address the core functions of the Museum to collect, research, and disseminate information.

Goals Two, Three, and Five more subtly address the mission. Goal Two addresses professional achievement, specifically to maintain accredited status by oversight organizations. Continued accreditation is important for the Museum because it confers prestige and a high level of achievement that can be demonstrated to the University and the public. Goal Three addresses public and professional initiatives, specifically to build partnerships with opportunities for Museum and University faculty and staff, while Goal Five addresses museological achievement, specifically to cultivate professional relationships through increased staff participation in area, regional, national, and international museum organizations. These two goals focus on professionalism, partnerships, and participation, all of which are very necessary not only to meet the mission as a quality institution of today, but also to realize the vision of the future. The vision of the Museum of Texas Tech University is that it will be a leader in developing the legal, ethical, and practical standards for generating, preserving, and using museum collections. As per best strategic planning practices, this is how mission is translated into vision.

Strategic planning goals are very broadly stated. For this reason, critical success factors are written to express the goals in terms that can be translated into real action. The objectives are written to give the goals specific definition. Strategies are written to illustrate the necessary actions in detail, and assessments are written to provide a measure of how well the objective has been realized. For example, Goal One is institutional advancement - to acquire and maintain quality collections that meet the mission and vision of the institution. Critical success factors for this goal are: to increase and enhance research and interpretive collections; to initiate models and techniques for collecting, data collecting, and data mining; to explore and exploit emergent technologies related to collections and collection data management; and to integrate the use of technology in teaching and learning processes. The first objective for this goal is to increase and enhance research and interpretation collections.

Strategies designed to meet this objective are: to enhance the art, ethnology and textiles, and history collections with objects that complement current collections; to increase investigation and collection of early vertebrates remains related to West Texas area; to increase the range of specimens in the Natural Science Collection; to continue research at the Lubbock Lake Landmark and the region to add to the information base about early inhabitants of the Southern Plains; and to increase fundraising to support and enhance museum collections. Assessments to measure if this objective has been realized are: number of objects added to the collections; number of natural science specimens; amount of research projects, publications, and website visits; number of tissue requests; number of fossils collected; and amount of funds raised. Each of the other four goals of the strategic plan are developed and expressed in the same manner. The complete strategic plan can be found on the Museum's website at www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu.

As can be seen, the level of information is organized from the broad and general to the detailed and specific. At the level of objectives, strategies, and assessments the specific activities clearly illustrate what the Museum must do in order to meet its goals. Other actions that are not in the strategic plan therefore are not a priority. It can clearly be seen, then, when tough choices have to be made, how having the plan facilitates strategic decision-making and allocation of resources. Having the plan most certainly makes choosing the best course of action easier.

Strategic planning only helps secure the mission if the plan is actually used as a tool to guide decision-making and actions. When put into practice, the plan can assist in the delivery of surprisingly pleasant results. During the most recent assessment we were happy to discover that the Museum actually had met several of its objectives and had moved closer to meeting some of its goals. We also were disconcerted to realize that we

had done a poor job in expressing some specific strategies and assessments so that the assessments didn't really assess anything at all. Needless to say these were revised.

The modern university museum is not about individual curatorial goals but about meeting an institutional mission and vision that places the museum at the heart of service to society and its development. Using strategic planning to remain focused on core mission in times of change allows for collections to be developed and preserved for those entrusted with this important responsibility for the future.