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October 2013

FEATURE ARTICLE:

Strategic Planning and Budgeting:

5 Must-Read Misconceptions that Will Change Your Association's Strategy for 2014

Strategic planning is an essential part of association management, and yet few experts can agree on what the term actually involves. Here's a look at some of the common misconceptions we hear about strategic planning and association budgets—along with some quick clarifications to improve your 2014 objectives.

1. Your budget and your strategic plan are essentially the same thing.

Not quite. In a recent Harvard Business Review blog, management scholar and author, Roger Martin, draws a line between the fundamentals of strategy and the nitty-gritty of budgeting. "Strategy is not planning," Martin emphasizes. "It is the making of an integrated set of choices that collectively position the [organization] so as to create sustainable advantage relative to competition and deliver superior financial returns."

In other words, your strategic plan should not be an exhaustive list of all the programs and initiatives you intend to support in 2014. Instead, it should be a simpler, directional document that will guide your decision-making process during budget talks, which necessarily need to come afterward.

2. Leave budgeting to your finance team.

Nope. The best approach is almost always an inclusive one. Your entire leadership team should be involved in the budget process; an executive subcommittee for budget is sometimes an efficient way to represent everyone. Further, encourage transparency and develop frameworks for all parties—including volunteers and association members— to have some kind of voice in budgetary decisions. After all, these are often the

Ask the Industry Experts

Q: ***When it comes to strategic planning, what's one thing all successful organizations need to do well?***

A: Great organizations understand how to look at the big picture. Jack Welch once said, "if the rate of change outside exceeds the rate of change inside, the end of your organization is in sight." Successful organizations understand the importance of environmental scans in their strategic planning. Because if the Board isn't looking at the big picture, who is?

Get more advice on how to drive a successful strategic plan for your organization with Andy Freed's Association's To Don'ts List.

Virtual Employee Profile

Ann O'Connor Geary is the vice president of human resources at Virtual. Geary directs all HR initiatives for client staff—

folks who best understand shifting industry trends, revenue opportunities, competition, and constituents' top concerns.

3. Estimated costs and projected revenue are the key components of any association budget.

Yes and no. When planning your association budget, think beyond measurable, short-term profit. The soft ROI attached to member engagement and satisfaction, for example, should play a role in defining priorities and allocating funds. We work with one client whose principal activity is a financial loser on the P&L—but it's the item that members value most and puts the organization on the map. Sometimes dollars and cents only tell part of the story. Read More

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Client Spotlight

Each month, our newsletter highlights a Virtual client and a success story that demonstrates the value of association management. This month we're proud to feature SAFECode, which stands for "Software Assurance Forum for Excellence in Code." SAFECode is a global, nonprofit group working to deliver more secure, more reliable software and hardware, by advancing proven software assurance methods. In doing so, SAFECode aims to build trust in information/communications technology products and services.

Challenge

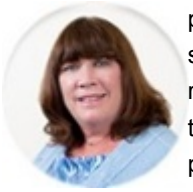
SAFECode was originally formed by some of the world's largest IT companies to develop standards for code security. As SAFECode has grown, this collaborative effort needed to be refined. SAFECode also recognized an emerging need for an Executive Director to serve as a forum spokesperson.

Solution

Virtual provided project management services, strategic guidance, and operational oversight. We also helped SAFECode develop training programs, best practice documents, and other assets to support software assurance in the cyber ecosystem.

Result

Virtual ensured SAFECode remained laser-focused on its mission, with its members able to focus on the mission of the organization, not the administration. As SAFECode has continued to grow, Virtual helped the group retain former White House Cyber Security Czar, Howard Schmidt, to serve as Executive Director.



providing services like recruitment, training, career planning, and development—to help organizations maximize human capital and uncover operational efficiencies along the way.

"We can handle the process from soup to nuts," Geary confirms. "Many of our clients are looking for initial recruitment services. So we provide job descriptions, job ads, resume screening, preliminary phone interviews, and background checks to take that burden off the organization."

Employee hosting services are another major facet of Geary's role. Working alongside Insperity, Virtual's professional employer organization (PEO), Geary makes it effortless for associations to onboard new employees and manage their benefits.

"Our relationship with Insperity allows clients to provide robust benefits at a cost that's conducive to small organizations," says Geary. Employee relations and career development are a focal point, too. "Insperity offers great online training systems. Our hosted employees can browse a catalogue of online courses—from topics in IT to the basics of marketing."

Geary also facilitates association compliance with employment law and liability. "The healthcare reform process," for example. "Clients don't have to worry about it with Insperity behind us." Geography isn't a factor either; through Insperity, Virtual can oversee

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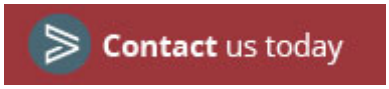
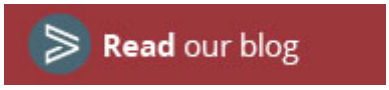
hosted employees throughout the country and even internationally.

“We help people not just with the services, but with the strategies behind them,” Geary explains. “We look at current trends to be sure we’re providing clients and their employees with the best resources available.”





Virtual, Inc 401 Edgewater Place, Suite 600 Wakefield MA 01880 USA

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