



CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

Food Bank Develops Strategic Plan that Leads to \$11 Million Building Strategic Planning

Worked with a group of board and staff members to develop a strategic plan and a first year implementation plan. Client said, "This was the most comprehensive and thorough long-range planning process the Food Bank has conducted in its 23 year history. We have a clear blueprint for the next few years and are implementing action planning that has overall alignment." First year outcomes included improved employee satisfaction and successful launch of an \$11 million capital campaign for new facilities.

The Atlanta Community Food Bank (ACFB), one of the oldest and most successful food banking programs in the country, was bursting at the seams. Its infrastructure could barely contain all its programs. Split between several buildings, with information technology and logistics systems struggling to serve its 730 member agencies, seven major programs, and 50 employees, leaders of the ACFB were in the process of considering building a new facility.

Knowing that this type of undertaking would require excellent planning, the Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer were referred to me by a consultant colleague to help them design and facilitate a process that would result in a new four-year strategic plan. The Food Bank had always been ambitious with its goals, stretching its facilities and people. The new strategic planning process had to bring staff and board together to understand the needs of all constituents, to be honest about both ambitions and capacity, and to develop a blueprint for how to achieve those ambitious goals.

The planning process had five key goals:

- Board and staff members excited and committed to accomplishing the plan
- A clear understanding of the Food Bank's external environment, as seen by its key stakeholders
- Information to guide facility and capital planning
- Measurable objectives that could guide the organization's actions
- Information that would support budgeting for the next fiscal year and beyond

Our first challenge was to make sure that planning was based on sound information rather than hypotheses or assumptions. We began with a thorough environmental scan that collected data from multiple constituents: from employees related to the work climate and their individual wants, needs and interests; from member agencies related to their experience of Food Bank, their agency goals and anticipated needs, and the trends they saw in their environment; from select funders related to their interests and expectations of the Food Bank, and the funding climate; and from product donors related to trends in product availability. By engaging all of the constituents, we gathered their wisdom, got them invested in the outcome, and primed them to participate in execution.

The next step was to develop a compelling shared vision to forward and complement the already well-understood and embraced mission. As in many organizations, the real challenge here was to bring together the perspectives of senior and mid-level staff to include both the external and internal aspirations of the Food Bank.

With a new vision as our guide, we developed specific goals and objectives, as well as measures and milestones for each goal that would allow us to track accomplishments.

We conducted an organization capability assessment as part of the strategic planning process to assure that the new plan was achievable. Not surprisingly, some of the goals and objectives had to be revised

based on the assessment. In some cases, the Food Bank chose to develop additional capacity. Feedback was solicited from both the board and the employees before finalizing the plan.

The final part of the process was to plan implementation. While execution is often left for “after the strategic planning process,” we ask clients to invest in a strong implementation plan to ensure the success of their initiatives. Organizations lose momentum after the strategic planning stage if they are not prepared to implement.

Of the results, the COO says: “Because a primary goal was to use this strategic plan to guide a major capital campaign to raise over 10 million dollars for a new facility, I’m thrilled to confirm that, when included as a key document in several initial major foundation funding proposals, our Strategic Plan

Summary document played an important role in leveraging two \$2-million grants. I’m sure our thorough strategic planning process solidified the ‘sale’ to the key funding prospects.”

By December 2004 the new 129,000 square foot, state-of-the-art warehouse was opened and dedicated, the capital campaign fundraising had exceeded its goals, and other key outcomes of the strategic plan had been achieved.

According to the COO, overall results of the planning process were stellar. The planning document was used to guide the Food Bank’s annual planning process throughout the five years of the plan. All five goals of the process were achieved - and then some.

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