EuroNPUD
European Network of People who Use Drugs

EuroNPUD Network Strengthening Project

STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

NETWORK
STRENGTHENING

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

DUGs	Drug User Groups
Mins	Minutes
SWOT	Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACTIVITY

Tasks to be implemented to achieve the desired output of a project or programme; also referred to as a ***'task'***.

BUDGET

The financial, or in-kind, cost of fully implementing an activity, or task, of a project or programme.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Describes the communication systems that an organisation will use, and for what purpose, with different audiences to achieve the communications objectives of a strategy.

CORE GROUP

A small, central or senior group, normally with regular executive responsibilities. In some organisations, this core group will include all, or some, of the governing Board, while in others the governing Board members may be better thought of as stakeholders (as well as supervisors); it depends on how much responsibility they will take and how active they will be in the process of developing the strategy.

FACILITATOR

A person who engages in facilitation, i.e. any activity that makes a social process easy or easier.

IN-KIND COST

Inputs to an activity that are counted in non-monetary terms, e.g. time volunteered by an individual to support the delivery of an output of an activity.

STAKEHOLDERS

This term can have a variety of meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In its widest definition, it refers to all those who have an interest in the organisation's work (all those who work within, or alongside, the organisation, its clients and those who have an interest in the welfare of its clients and the donors contributing to the organisation). Where the meaning of the term is not specified, it should be taken to refer only to those who work within the organisation.

STRATEGY

Reflects the intentions of an organisation; it is most effective when developed with, and owned by, key stakeholders of the organisation.

STRATEGIC AIM

The result(s) that the organisation seeks to achieve; also referred to as ***'purpose'*** or *'goal'*.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION(S)

These are the projects that are implemented to achieve each of the strategic objectives.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE(S)

To achieve the aim(s), all of the objectives need to be achieved.

STRATEGIC PLAN(S)

Communicates what an organisation plans to do during a specified period of time; describes the activities required to achieve the strategic results, including timeline and identification of people responsible for each activity.

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EuroNPUD's Strategic Planning Guide was developed as a resource documenting the strategic planning model that we used as a regional drug user network, while developing our 2018 – 2021 Strategic Plan. EuroNPUD was a relatively small but ambitious drug user rights network committed to making best use of participative development models to consult, engage and ensure ownership of our strategy among the EuroNPUD Team.

This Guide sets out a straightforward process for strategic planning. It describes a process of consultations and a strategic planning meeting that will deliver the required information to write a strategic plan that is owned by the organisation.

EuroNPUD's next four-year strategy will see us move to independent registration and move beyond our current hosting phase. We are publishing this Strategic Plan Development Guide so all our member groups and country drug user organisers understand and can participate in our next strategic planning cycle.

We also offer this resource to the wider drug user rights movement and our allies as a resource to help those looking to strategically strengthen their organisations.

We are grateful to Simon Mollison, the consultant who drafted the working draft of the document. Many thanks to Graham Shaw who donated his time to edit and strengthen the resource. Thanks to James Baer for his fine editing skills.

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Mat Southwell
EuroNPUD Project Executive
March 2021

INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to provide simple and easy to use help for relatively new organisations to develop a coherent strategy. The aim is to demystify the process without sacrificing any of the needed rigour. Users are urged to follow this development guide in spirit but to also feel free to adapt it to their own situation and capacity.

Purpose of a Strategy

A ***strategic plan*** communicates what an organisation plans to do during a specified time period (three years is typical) and why. It describes how it will achieve as much as it can for its clients, members, participants and beneficiaries, including the needed actions for its own growth and development. It can be a very useful promotional resource for an organisation and, because it is developed with its key stakeholders, it ensures that everyone understands, and is committed to, the organisation's vision and programme. The resulting focus can help to ensure that everyone is working in the same direction and towards the same goals, and that they are guided by the same principles.

Creation and piloting of this Development Guide

This Guide has been developed by ***EuroNPUD*** as part of its Network Strengthening Project and in order to create a ***Guide to Strengthening Drug User Groups and Networks***. A group of drug user groups (DUGs) and other partners piloted these resources to test their effectiveness and to help to make improvements.

This guide describes the strategic planning process used by EuroNPUD and supports the development of the following management tools:

1. The ***Project Plan*** describes the activities required to achieve the strategy with timelines and identifies the people responsible for each task;

2. The ***Budget*** costs the delivery of the ***Project Plan*** through linking cost to activity;

3. The ***Communications Plan*** describes the communication systems that an organisation will use and for what purpose with different audiences to achieve the communications objectives of a Strategy.

4. The ***Advocacy and Partnership Network*** describes where the representative of an organisation connects with partner organisations and where the advocates of an organisation engage with Government and multi-lateral bodies to deliver the Strategy.

Terminology and the hierarchy of objectives

If you research the development of strategies online, you will find different structures and definitions. Often the same term is used in different ways or different terms are used to mean the same thing. Much of this is to do with the different ***'levels'*** involved in planning models or what has been called the ***'hierarchy of objectives'***. An objective can be broken down to lower order objectives that, when achieved, lead to the achievement of the higher order objective.

In this Guide, the names used for this hierarchy are as follows:

STRATEGIC AIM(S):

The result(s) that the organisation seeks to achieve;

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE(S):

To achieve the aim(s), all of the objectives need to be achieved;

STRATEGIC DIRECTION(S):

These are the projects that are implemented to achieve each of the strategic objectives.

(*Project plans* have their own hierarchy of objectives).

You will find resources using different terms (such as 'purpose' and 'goal') to mean the same things and the same terms used to represent a different level to those used above. This does not matter – it is the logical relationship between the levels that is important.

Participative development process

Strategies are most effective when they are developed with, and owned by, key stakeholders in the organisation. This is particularly true for representatives, community groups or networks. This ***Development Guide*** describes how each section of a ***Strategy*** should be developed and written. It also makes suggestions about exercises that you can use with your team to agree your strategy. Key strategic decisions are likely to be made at a key planning meeting. It is likely that this planning meeting will be proceeded by consultations that feed into the main strategic planning event.

Who should participate – how are they chosen?

A strategy reflects the intentions of an organisation. Different organisations can have very different structures, and the status of different groups within these structures can vary considerably.

In this Guide, the terms *'core group'* and *'stakeholders'* are used which are defined as follows:

CORE GROUP

A small, central or senior group, normally with regular executive responsibilities. In some organisations, this core group will include all, or some, of the governing Board, while in others the governing Board members may be better thought of as stakeholders (as well as supervisors); it depends on how much responsibility they will take and how active they will be in the process of developing the strategy.

STAKEHOLDERS

This term can have a variety of meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In its widest definition, it refers to all those who have an interest in the organisation's work (all those who work within, or alongside, the organisation, its clients and those who have an interest in the welfare of its clients and the donors contributing to the organisation). Where the meaning of the term is not specified, it should be taken to refer only to those who work within the organisation.

At the same time, the term ***participation*** can mean many different things, ranging from individuals who are being ***'consulted'*** through to those who are ***'fully involved'*** and to those ***'in control'***. Throughout this Guide, efforts are made to be clear as to how meaningful participation can be ensured and realised during the various stages involved in the development of a strategy/strategic plan.

The group that comes together to think through the strategy needs to reflect the range of stakeholders in the organisation (potentially this includes staff, volunteers, managers, members, peer workers, clients/service users, families, etc.). But strategic planning meetings comprising more than 20 people will be difficult to manage. Even 20 people is a large group and managing an event with this many people may benefit from being led by a skilled facilitator with plans for ensuring that everyone can participate meaningfully. At the same time, the 20 participants can represent a much larger number of people who selected them and, in doing so, granted them a mandate to participate in the meeting and to represent their views in the meeting. The chosen representatives will generally be accountable and will "report back" to the larger group(s) that they each represent.

The organisation may also want to consult external stakeholders – partners, clients, donors – as part of their strategy process and this can be achieved in one of two ways:

1

By consulting partners and donors in advance of the event. This can be achieved by asking key and trusted partners to complete an anonymous SWOT analysis of your organisation:

- Strengths
- Weakness
- Opportunities
- Threats

A consultant, or designated team member, can compile the responses into a single SWOT analysis from all the invited partners. This compilation can be shared with the participants in the strategic planning event to provide them with an external perspective of the organisation.

2

Partners and donors can be involved by consulting them about a draft strategy document, produced after the strategic planning event. There will then be a need to consider, and use, the feedback in the final document, perhaps by a core group who then seek validation from the original members of the strategy event.

The first of these options is recommended as it allows the perceptions of important external people and institutions to be considered during the strategy process and it is easier to ensure that there is broad ownership in how this feedback is handled.

Facilitating the process

Discussions and meetings to develop a strategy will work best if all the participants are able to contribute and to consider options. This will help ensure their ownership of, and clarity about, the results of the meeting. An important question concerns whether the process will be facilitated by someone from outside or from within the organisation. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages.

An ***external facilitator*** could have stronger skills and experience in facilitating group processes. If this is the case:

- They should be better able to support the design of the strategic development process (based on their own experience of running such events as well as through use of this Development Guide);
- They should be more skilled in ensuring that different stakeholders are heard and meaningfully engaged in the process;
- Their neutrality may also help the participants to feel able to express their true thoughts and feelings;
- They will also be skilled at helping a group to arrive at a genuine consensus ("the best result that is at least acceptable to all participants" – not the same as a majority view but more powerful in bringing the group together);
- They can also help guide participants through the agreed agenda, ensuring that the meeting keeps moving forward.

A less skilled external facilitator may at least have the advantage of neutrality. But there are also down-sides to using such a person:

- They can be expensive;
- They may lack understanding of the organisation or the issues facing its clients.

Using an external facilitator will be a good choice for larger organisations, or where a sense of hierarchy is strong (as participants may be reluctant to go against a leader), or when there are potentially strong disagreements among the group.

An ***internal facilitator*** will know more about the participants, the organisation and its work and these can be strong advantages.

It will often make sense to choose an internal facilitator who has good facilitation skills and is widely seen as open to alternative views and ideas. However, facilitation of a group process is a full-time role, so an internal facilitator would lose the chance to participate in the process.

!

Whichever approach to facilitation is chosen, ***the person leading the process will need to be acquainted with basic approaches to organisational and programme planning*** – drafting of aims and objectives and in ensuring that all individuals can come together into a complete and feasible programme.

Preparing for the strategy meeting

Aside from the practical preparations for holding the meeting – venue, materials and equipment, refreshments, etc. – there is also a need to consider whether some aspects of the final document might be prepared prior to the strategy meeting. The process described in this guide aims to arrive at a three-year strategy. But these three years are situated within an earlier history and longer-term intentions. If elements of these are unclear, or if it is decided that there may be a need to do some preparatory work on them, some of this might be done in the strategy meeting – at the risk of extending, and perhaps overloading, it – but it could also be done by a core group and shared (for validation) with the strategy meeting.

Those who have been invited to the strategic planning meeting also need to prepare and be supported to prepare. It is important to share a summary of the feedback from different consultations. A compiled version of the SWOT analysis with the feedback from different partners provides a good starting point for preparation. If you are coming to the end of an existing strategy it would be helpful to share the strategy and related progress reports. If participants are invited to bring a representative view from a particular group or organisation then sufficient time and guidance should be provided to support such participative planning.

The end point: a Strategy

The resulting strategy is a plan, a set of intentions and commitments. It is recorded in a strategy document – which is a record of the decisions made during the process along with some rationale for those choices. The strategy meeting needs to ensure that the various sections of the recommended structure have been covered and can be completed.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN DOCUMENT

This section describes and explains the various parts of the strategy and the structure of the eventual strategy document. The earlier sections (Sections 1-3) describe facts and decisions that should mostly predate the strategy meeting. They may be shared in the meeting but should not require significant work. The strategy meeting itself will need to consider the various parts of the strategy structure but with a strong focus on Sections 4-7.

SECTION **1**

Introduction

This brief section can be prepared when the strategy process is finished.

The ***'Introduction'*** briefly explains what the organisation does, why and how. It will bring out any unique or special aspects of the organisation. You can think of it as the ***'elevator pitch'*** for your organisation:

- **How you would explain your organisation if you only had a very short time (such as you would have in an elevator) to pitch it to a donor or partner?**

The introduction might also very briefly explain the purpose and history of the strategy – when it was prepared, who was involved and why they came together for this purpose.

SECTION **2**

Background

A draft of this section should be prepared prior to any strategy meeting(s) and may be shared in an introductory session of the meeting(s).

The background describes a variety of aspects of the organisation, answering questions such as why and how the organisation was formed, the kind of work it does and its relationship with its clients and the areas in which it works. You should also briefly describe the historical development of the organisation.

The following questions should be answered:

- the purpose of the organisation;
- its history;
- its geographic focus to-date (and intentions for the future, if decided);
- type of organisation – group (members are individuals), network (members are other groups or networks), service provider, advocacy organisation, etc.; and,
- overview of its operating model.

SECTION 3

Management and Organisational Model

As with Section 2, a draft of this section should be prepared prior to any strategy meeting(s) and may be shared in an introductory session of the meeting(s). It will be important to share (and, if they are new, to discuss) long-term plans for the development of the organisation. A description of these long-term plans should be ready prior to the meeting(s).

In this section, describe how your organisation is governed, managed and structured. Most organisations usually provide an organisational chart as well as a brief description in this section. **Briefly, cover the following:**

- The mandate of the governing board or steering committee along with the number of members, how they are chosen and how often they meet;
- The management staff in the organisation and their mandates;
- Other parts of the organisation's structure;
- Membership criteria;
- Staff, technical consultants and volunteers;
- Partners and key stakeholders; Hosting arrangements; and,
- Financial accounting/reporting.

If there are long-term plans or intentions concerning the growth or development of the organisation, these should be described. If there are no such plans but you can see a need for them, it will be worthwhile thinking these through (perhaps in a core group) prior to the strategy meeting. The meeting can be used to ensure buy-in or acknowledgement of these plans.

SECTION **4**

Direction Statements

The contents of this section are reviewed in the strategy meeting(s). If the Vision and Mission Statements do not already exist, they can be drafted by a core group prior to the strategy meeting(s) and discussed in the meeting, or the meeting can be used to develop these. The statement of organisational principles or values should be a product of the strategy meeting(s) if they do not already exist.

A strategy is generally thought of as having a specified life and we recommend developing your strategy for a three-year period. The strategic direction statements define key domains of work of your organisation and these may predate the new strategy and will probably continue beyond its three-year focus.

VISION

Where the organisation is going

The ***Vision*** statement is an image of the future sought by the organisation. It is usually a one-sentence statement that describes the important, big and long-term change that the organisation contributes to and seeks to bring about. The best visions are inspirational, clear, memorable, and concise.

EXAMPLES:

- Oxfam: A just world without poverty.
- Save the Children: A world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development, and participation.

- Amnesty International: A world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.

MISSION STATEMENT

While the ***vision*** is about what inspires you, the ***mission statement*** describes what the organisation does. It should be clear, concise and useful, and should avoid jargon. It should not be longer than two simple sentences, but one sentence is better. If your organisation is in a ***unique*** position to achieve its mission, it may make sense to spell this out (perhaps through starting the sentence with "Uniquely placed to ..." or "Needed to ...").

EXAMPLES:

- Human Rights Campaign: Working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality.
- Amnesty International: To undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of these rights.
- Natural resource users' group: Ensures that the resource is properly managed as only we can.

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

What are the organisation's values?

Principles distil or condense the organisation's values into a simple set of statements. These help staff and other stakeholders in the organisation to act in a strategically consistent way as well as communicating to others what the organisation is about. They set out the way your organisation works so people can make strategic and operational choices that fit with the principles of the organisation. They also allow the organisation to be held to account.

EXAMPLE – INPUD Principles

- Pro drug user rights
- Pro self-determination
- Pro harm reduction and safer drug use
- Respecting the right of individuals to take drugs
- Anti-prohibitionist
- Pro equality

EXAMPLE – Theatre for a Change

- Social Justice: Creating a more equal society.
- Service: Serving the most marginalised people first.
- Participation: Equal participation in everything we do.
- Honesty and Openness: Telling the truth and being open about our strengths and weaknesses.
- Integrity: Being true to all of our values.
- Responsibility: Taking responsibility for your own behaviour.
- Commitment: Committing to living our values.

Established organisations will have an established organisational culture, with values distilled into formal principles. For developing organisations, a discussion of the principles that should underlie and guide their work can be a very meaningful start to a strategy process.

SECTION **5**

Strategic Aims and Objectives

This section records the true start of the strategy process – its content comes directly from the strategy meeting(s) – and contains strong general statements about what the organisation will be doing over the period of the strategy.

Strategies are time-bound. For relatively new and developing organisations, they can usefully describe what the organisation will achieve over a three-year period. Crafting the strategic aims and objectives is an important task and it is worth spending time to get it right. You need to find a balance between the aims and objectives being achievable and being ambitious.

The aims and the objectives are different levels of the same intention – taken together, the objectives contribute to achieving the aim(s). Getting the aims and objectives right often involves going between these two levels until they fit well together. There is a trade-off between precision and generality in aims and objectives. The more precise they are, the easier it will be to manage progress towards achieving them. But it is usually easier to agree and remember relatively general aims and objectives. More precision can be added during the later process for considering monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

AIMS

Strategic aims are the large changes that the organisation can, and will, achieve over the designated period of time. They are related to the mission. Strategic aims provide a focus for an organisation, so it is often preferable to choose only one aim that captures the impact that the organisation seeks to achieve during the strategic period. The aim(s) should, if possible, encapsulate ***all*** that the organisation will be doing during the strategic period.

OBJECTIVES

Breaking a problem down into smaller parts is a basic method of problem solving. Strategic objectives are smaller and more manageable results that, taken together, lead to achieving the strategic aim(s). They include the objectives for the work that the organisation will be doing as well as for any developments that the organisation needs to be able to do the work.

EXAMPLES (hypothetical):

- **ORGANISATION 1: Aim –** To achieve a large increase in coverage for family planning services in the west of the country.
- **Objectives –**
  - To win the commitment of health officials and donors to family planning;
  - To train health workers in the west of the country in family planning methods;
  - To develop a network of mobile family planning support teams in the west of the country.

- **ORGANISATION 2: Aim** – To ensure a radical improvement in the quality and availability of pre-school services in the three focus regions.
- **Objectives –**
  - To initiate regional discussions between educationalists and families about the value of pre-school services to educational outcomes;
  - To support start-up pre-school units with small grants and basic training;
  - To establish a membership structure for pre-schools.

Note that the aims and objectives above are only slightly specific – for example, in the use of the phrases such as "win the commitment" and "radical improvement".

The above examples are hypothetical but show how a broad and ambitious aim might be achieved through attention to a set of objectives. It is quite possible that the same aims could be achieved by a very different set of objectives. The choice of objectives is a highly strategic one and should play on the strengths of the organisation as well as reflecting what the organisation believes is most likely to work.

SECTION **6**

Strategic Directions

This section is entirely the product of the strategy meetings.

Strategic directions are the work streams that will form the basis of the project plan. They are the key themes of work that will be undertaken to meet the strategic aim and objectives. They should describe the area of work and the resources that will be brought to bear to deliver this component of the strategy, but they do not need to go into detail. The detailed breakdown of tasks, sub-tasks, milestones, deadlines and lead staff will be covered in the ***Project Plan*** and will be costed in the ***Budget***.

EXAMPLE:

For the aims and objectives of ***"Organisation 1"***, above, the strategic directions could be:

ADVOCACY PROJECT:

- Meet with allies to prepare strategies and methods for influencing health officials and donors;
- Secure funding for the project;
- Establish a multi-agency steering group to plan and deliver advocacy and lobbying activities;
- Deliver on plans.

TRAINING PROGRAMME:

- Undertake a study of existing knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) for family planning of health workers;
- Develop training modules and materials;
- Deliver training.

MOBILISING SUPPORT TEAMS:

- Recruiting the teams;
- Training the teams;
- Developing a management (and accountability) structure for supervising the teams.

Project proposals can be developed to secure the resources required to deliver the strategic directions but, as developing proposals can take a long time, it needs to be considered as an important early activity and based upon a well-founded hope or expectation. There is no point developing projects where there is little reason to be optimistic about obtaining the needed resources.

SECTION **7**

Communications

The two elements of this need to be discussed during the strategy meeting.

The Communications section of the strategy speaks to the strategic approach to communications. **This usually covers two different areas:**

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

How the different parts of the organisation talk to each other and the technology they use to do so. It may also be valuable to stipulate norms – what sort of information needs to be shared between different parts of the organisation – and, consequently, begins to address management arrangements in the organisation.

EXTERNALLY FOCUSSED COMMUNICATIONS

What information is shared with the outside world, whether and how it is targeted and the various reasons for sharing information. It includes the use of the website, newsletters and social media as well as informal reporting to donors and external stakeholders.

The Communications section of the strategy guides and enables the development of a ***Communications Plan***, which is a practically focussed listing of the different communications platforms that are used to run both forms of communication.

SECTION **8**

Monitoring and Evaluation

This element will normally be defined at the end of the strategy meeting once the Strategic Directions and Communications plan are set.

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) section defines how the organisation's staff and members will know whether they are on track in delivering the results promised in the strategy. In addition, it also shows how the organisation will demonstrate to its governing body and donors how well it has met its stated objectives and has delivered the agreed deliverables.

So far in the strategy, the aims and objectives have been expressed in fairly general ways. It is during the consideration of M&E that these are qualified in more specific and measurable terms. This precision is provided through specifying ***indicators*** that will tell us whether or not we have achieved the objectives.

The important factors to define are *time* (when the result is expected), *quantity* (the number of people and/or units that will be involved and/or reached), and *quality* (how good the service or action should be).

EXAMPLE:

For an objective concerned with a "radical increase" in the availability of a service, an indicator might specify that this means opening ***25*** new service points within ***2 years***. The quality of the service might be measured by the proportion of clients who return (which should be low for a "curative" service or high for a regular/routine service).

Measuring *progress* towards objectives allows you to see where you might tweak plans that are not delivering what was expected. It is undesirable to tweak aims: it is a serious matter that involves changing the result you are working towards. But tweaking, or even changing, objectives may be a valid response to a situation where your original objectives are not delivering the expected results. If monitoring is telling you that you are not achieving what you planned, it may be legitimate to change strategic directions or even strategic objectives.

Ideally, indicators are collected by doing things that the project would be doing anyway. So, if a service is being provided, it is likely that you are already recording the number of people it reaches.

An evaluation should be planned at the end of the strategic period and a smaller evaluative review might also be considered at a mid-point. Donors will often expect an external evaluator to conduct the evaluation but, even if they do not, it is good practice to involve people who do not have a stake in the result but do possess knowledge and experience of doing similar work. It is also important to ensure that the various stakeholders of the organisation (both internal and external) are consulted and involved in the evaluation.

An evaluation (or a review) will address such questions as:

- Were the expected results achieved?
- Were they as desirable and important as expected?
- Were any unexpected results achieved?
- What lessons were learned that might be valuable for future projects?
- What lessons were learned concerning how well the organisation functioned?

Most of these questions can be broken down into many separate questions.

There are two broad models for undertaking research:

1 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

- Quantitative Research is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into usable statistics. It is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other defined variables – and generalize results from a sample population.
- Quantitative Research uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research.

- Quantitative data collection methods include various forms of surveys, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, longitudinal studies, website interceptors, online polls, and systematic observations.

- It helps us to measure tangible things, for example, questions that measure how many, how much, how big, and so forth.

- Quantitative tools allow you to say things like "500 people attended our outreach," "150 people received new needles & syringes in our programme" or "rate of needle reuse reduced by 40% because of our intervention."

- A common example is the use of surveys where a well-structured questionnaire is administered. This could be online surveys, paper surveys, mobile surveys and kiosk surveys, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, longitudinal studies, website interceptors, online polls, and systematic observations.

2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

- Qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations.

- Some common methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, and participation/observations.

- Qualitative data collection methods are less structured and are often driven by open questions.

- The sample size is typically small, and respondents are selected to fulfil a given quota.

EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Interviews

You can decide to talk to one person at a time to find out how they feel about the programme and if it is of benefit to them. They may tell you what has changed in their lives before and during the programme.

Observation

You can observe the attitude of your programme participants, maybe when you reach out to them, or how they behave or relate with the programme. This may also include listening to what they say to others about your intervention without you necessarily asking them any questions. It may also be about how they handle the commodities you provide to them or their attitude within the health centre. All these are data that can inform you about the status of a component or entire programme.

Focus group discussions

This involves having a discussion among a small group of people (may be 3 to 8). Through directed, open-ended questions, you can learn a great deal about how they perceive and are impacted by your programme before it begins, as it runs, and after it ends. Focus groups are typically "facilitated" by someone with specific experience, recorded, and transcribed.

PROCESS/MEETING(S) FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

This section looks at how to run the strategy meeting and suggests some exercises that can be used. Refer to the description of the structure of the strategy document (above) for further clarity about the content and objectives of each session.

SESSION **1**

Foundations

REASONS FOR THE SESSION

The session establishes foundations for the strategy. It covers a description of the organisation and its long-term plans; the principles of the organisation and the organisation's mission. Where these are already established, it is concerned with reminding participants of them. Where these have recently been decided by a different (smaller) group, it serves the purpose of informing the participants and getting feedback from them. What has not been decided previously will probably need to be decided before going forward.

METHODS

THE ORGANISATION	*There may be value in discussing needs, intentions or plans for the organisation to grow or to develop a more formal structure. In some organisations, ensuring that this is done will be the responsibility of a particular ("core", "senior" or "founding") group and, in that case, it will usually make sense for the decisions to have been made prior to the strategy meeting.*

This part of the session is concerned with the dissemination (perhaps with some discussion) of information: review the history and long-term plans of the organisation. Be clear about how the participants fit into this.

VISION AND MISSION

If the organisation has a vision and a mission statement, then remind the participants of these and advise them that their work today will be to develop a three-year programme that will take the organisation forward towards its vision and in its long-term mission. If there are no current vision and mission statements, there is a choice between one being prepared by a core group prior to the strategy meeting (and validating the results in the meeting) or preparing the mission statement during the meeting.

It makes sense to create a *vision* first. To arrive at a vision:

- **Brainstorm the difficulties faced by clients (15 minutes):** The group is invited to quickly brainstorm about the organisation's client group and how the world they live in impinges upon them;
- **Brainstorm on what would be better (15 minutes):** The group thinks of all the ways that the client group's lives could be so much better.

(Up to this point, there is no real need to record the ideas and thoughts that come from the group. But it will be necessary to record – on a flip chart or white board – the group's responses to the following questions.)

- **"A better world, part 1" (20 minutes)**: The group brainstorms the qualities (single words or simple phrases) that an ideal and just world (for our client group) would have;

- **"A better world, part 2" (20 minutes):** The group combines the words and phrases into a simple coherent sentence that describes this ideal and just world.

The organisation's ***mission*** can then be developed. It concerns what the organisation is well placed to contribute to achieve the vision. It draws upon the organisation's history and structure and asks what is special and different about the organisation. It is probably a good idea to ask for suggested sentences from the group, with each suggestion being briefly discussed and critiqued, until a sentence is arrived at that seems to the participants to reflect an inspiring description of the organisation's mission. Note that it is not necessary to think of the organisation realising this mission alone: what we are after is a statement of what the organisation is uniquely placed to contribute.

PRINCIPLES

It can be powerful to begin a strategy process with a discussion of the organisation's principles. ***If these are already decided,*** *then they might be reviewed, and the meeting might be asked to think through their implications for the directions that the organisation should, and should not, take.* ***If the principles have not previously been decided****, then there will be value in developing them, and the following process can be used for this.*

The organisation's values and principles can be drawn out of the meeting through discussion in response to questions (30 mins+) such as:

- What are the important principles underlying the work that we do?
- What principles are important for organisations doing the kind of work we do and working with our client group(s)?
- When you access services (or support), what values and behaviours of service providers are important to you?
- How should policy be made concerning our client group(s)?
- What rights should our client group(s) enjoy?

Alternatively (or, even better, additionally), the principles can be drawn out in a slightly longer and more personal process (60 mins+) as follows:

- Divide the group into smaller groups (4-7 is ideal);
- The members of the small groups contribute experiences (stories are best) that show how some good behaviour or attitude from a service provider or official led to an unexpectedly good result;
- The stories are shared in the groups and two are chosen as being the most inspiring or positive;
- In the larger group, the chosen stories are shared, and some are chosen as particularly inspiring or positive;

- In the larger group, the chosen stories are examined to identify the values or principles that led to the story being such so positive;
- The large group then tries to think of ways that these “values” can be made even stronger and more positive; and,
- Anything important missing? If so, add it.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Prepare handouts and/or flipcharts/overheads of key statements if they already exist; and,
- Ensure materials are available for groups to record the results of their sessions in ways that will help them to feed back to the larger group.

SESSION **2**

Strategic Aims & Objectives

REASONS FOR THE SESSION

The strategic aims and objectives establish the strategy. They represent an achievable, but ambitious, programme of work for the organisation to undertake over the next three years. The intention is to capture the focus of the work (all of it!) of the organisation, so this exercise also involves deciding what the organisation will not do (i.e. anything that is not covered by the aims and objectives chosen here).

METHODS

As the decisions made in this session are the most crucial of the whole process, it is worth allowing as much time as is needed. How much time is needed will depend on how clear the participants are about the purpose of, and methods used by, the organisation.

There are many ways of arriving at a set of strategic aims and objectives. It is important to consider the priority needs of the client groups of the organisation as well as the potential results that can come from addressing these. It is also important to consider what special advantages and abilities the organisation has for addressing these needs and whether the organisation can strengthen its abilities in some way. An open discussion of these factors will often be useful as an opening exercise.

The group should then move on to choosing the aims and objectives. Initially, the process for choosing the aim(s) can be quite quick. Then, as the objectives are considered, it will often be desirable to return to the aim(s): the strategic aims and objectives are two levels of the same strategy and need to be considered together.

ORGANISATIONAL AIMS

- **Introduce the task (15 mins):** Following a discussion of the needs of the client group (see above), refer to the mission statement and principles and also to the organisation's history and direction;
- **Group discussion (20 mins):** What should the organisation try to achieve over the next three years?

Smaller groups (15 mins): Draft a strategic aim;

Group discussion (30 mins): Choose, or combine, and then improve the aim.

ORGANISATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Break up the aim into manageable actions that together will lead to achieving the aim. Do this through brainstorming as a whole group. Try to ensure that the objectives chosen reflect the strengths of the organisation as well as taking advantage of any facilitating aspects in the environment. **Keep asking the following questions of the results:**

- **Would achieving these objectives be *sufficient* to achieve the aim?** If not, you may need to add another objective, or to change the ones you have, or you could make the aim less ambitious;
- **Is achieving all of these objectives *necessary* for achieving the aim?** If not, you should remove unnecessary objectives or make the aim bigger.
- **Is the aim achievable for the organisation in three years?** There is no point in setting yourselves an impossible aim;
- **Is the aim sufficiently challenging for three years of work?** It should not be too easy, either!

If any participants feel able to describe the overall approach to achieving the aim(s) at any point during this process, they should be given the space to do so.

NOTE ON LEVELS: As we have seen, the strategic aim and the strategic objectives represent different levels in a hierarchy. Because of this, the facilitator will need to ensure that no single objective includes more than one level in itself! When an objective uses, or implies, the word “to” more than once, it is likely that it represents more than one level.

For example, if an objective says something like,

> *“**To** establish a network of committed people **so as to** ensure support and representation at community level.”*

This represents a lower order objective (the action of establishing a network) *and* a higher order objective (ensuring support and representation) and the two need to be split and assigned to their appropriate levels.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Flipchart papers and pens, or other appropriate materials, should be made available for participants (in the full group and in smaller groups) to record the results of their discussions so that they can be shared and discussed by the whole group.

SESSION 3

Strategic Directions

REASONS FOR THE SESSION

Once the strategic aims and objectives have been decided, the group can begin to design the work that the organisation will do to achieve these. This will help ensure clarity as to what actions, and what resources, are needed to achieve each objective. Often, this is quite easy – in drafting the objectives, members of the group will already have formed some ideas about how they will be achieved – but it is worth spending time exploring options. Also, it is possible that the considerations emerging from this activity will lead to a recognition that the objectives need further revision.

METHODS

It is best to have the same number of strategic directions as strategic objectives so that the one leads clearly to the other. This is not essential but is easier to do and the result will be easier to use. One (or perhaps two) strategic direction should focus on developing the internal capacity of the organisation and there will be a need to plan for resource mobilisation on what is already known to be feasible and realistic.

It is good to consider different ways of arriving at each of the strategic objectives before choosing one approach to achieve each objective. This can be done by having small groups each deliberating (probably with different results that can then be compared) or by an initial brainstorm in the main group (drawing out the different possibilities).

- In many cases, two or three smaller groups will be the best option, with each tasked with drafting a full set of directions. The groups should be allowed sufficient time to do a good job;
- Groups should then come back together into the main group to share their results;
- A discussion about the best/ideal set of directions should allow the group to finalise the task.

At each stage, the same testing questions that were used in the aims and objectives session should be used. One additional question should be applied to the set of directions:

- **Does the organisation have the skills, connections and resources to do this work?**

  If the answer is not positive, the direction concerned with organisational development should be strengthened.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Again, flipcharts and pens are useful.

SESSION 4

Communications

REASONS FOR THE SESSION

The objective of this session is to develop clarity on how communications will be used to internally run the organisation and to communicate with the outside world – all in the service of the strategic aim and objectives.

The Communications Plan provides a clear purpose and a detailed breakdown of the platforms that will be used to reach different audiences. It is helpful, and practical, to set this out as a table.

Organisations may, or may not, have established communications systems for internal communications and/or communication with those outside the organisation. If your organisation already has systems in place, then a discussion of how well they work, and how they might be improved, will be useful. If not, then it makes sense to design a communications system, or plan, in the meeting and this might involve some preparation before the meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION OF THE STRATEGY – METHODS

The ***Communications Section*** of the ***Strategy*** sets out the broad strategic approach with both your internal and external audiences.

Work in two small groups –

GROUP 1 –
INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS:

- Who makes up your internal world?
- Where are they located?
- How do you communicate with them?
- How do you collaborate together?
- How do you track, and manage, the work of your team?

Be as specific as possible about the people, or groups, you are connecting with and the platforms that you use to communicate, collaborate and manage your work.

GROUP 2 -
EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS:

- *Who are the people you need to inform; to be accountable to; or to influence?*
- *Where are they located?*
- *How do you communicate with them?*
- *How do you consult them?*
- *Are there key times of the calendar, financial or programme year when you have news to share with this external audience (i.e. monthly, quarterly or annual progress reports)?*

Be as specific as possible about the people, or groups, you are connecting with and the platforms that you use to communicate.

PRODUCING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The *Communications Plan* is a much more practical and detailed document that is most usefully set out as a table, listing the different platforms and apps, what you use them for, the purpose in using them, and who leads the communications system. This task can be managed separately from your strategic planning meeting, or you might choose to complete the task during the strategic planning meeting or at the sidelines of the meeting.

METHODS

- Brainstorm the different communications apps and social media platforms that your organisation is using or plans to use;
- Against each app or platform, identify the audience you are trying to reach (i.e. staff, members, donors, etc.) and for what purpose (i.e. to consult, to inform, to collaborate, etc);

  Identify the resources required to set up and engage the target audience with the system and identify the person who will lead this work;
- Sort the list into priority order, putting the most important platforms at the top; this will help guide your investment of time. It is better to do some things well and consistently rather than starting on many platforms but not following through;
- The template for the *Communications Plan*, or the plan used by EuroNPUD, can be used as an example of the practical and straightforward focus of this planning exercise.

SESSION **5**

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

REASONS FOR THE SESSION

Monitoring the organisation's implementation of the strategy ensures that everyone is clear about progress, and areas where progress is different to what was intended. It allows the strategic programme to be managed and, where needed, for changes to plans to be made.

Evaluation is a review of the organisation's progress in realising its strategic aims and objectives and should be done in ways that ensures the organisation can learn any lessons from its performance. Evaluations can be undertaken at the mid-point of a programme as well as at the end.

Both monitoring and evaluation are important for demonstrating results to donors and other stakeholders as well as for the management of the organisation to undertake its tasks. The strategy meeting does not need to spend much time thinking about the evaluation – noting that there will be one at the end and deciding whether a mid-point review will also be needed – but should spend some time thinking about monitoring arrangements that **include the following:**

- **The gathering of information in real time to inform the management of the service;**
- **Undertaking a process that helps make the objectives measurable;**
- **How will you demonstrate that you have achieved your stated objectives?**
- **Description of the methods that you will use to validate your work.**

METHODS

One useful exercise is to revisit the strategic aims and objectives and to specify quantities, quality and times. This might be undertaken by presenting the aims and objectives on flipcharts in the form of a table. **For the strategic aim(s):**

	QUANTITY	QUALITY	TIME
AIM	How many clients or units?	What performance will we consider adequate? How will we know it?	(For these results) When will we achieve this?

The same should be undertaken for the strategic objectives, taking care that the chosen values remain sufficient and necessary for achieving the aim.

Doing this will effectively define the aims and objectives in a more precise form. The chosen "indicators" should be easy to measure while conducting the programme – they should emerge easily from the programme – and the main point is to specify where this "data" will be collected, analysed (thought about) and stored. There will be a need for the meeting group to discuss what data will be used and what needs to be undertaken to ensure that such data are collected and in a timely manner.

SESSION **6**

Drafting Arrangements

REASONS FOR THE SESSION

A quick discussion clarifying who is responsible for drafting and finalising the strategy, how it will be signed off by the larger group .... And the dates for these tasks.

NETWORK
STRENGTHENING