WHERE DOES YOUR BEE CLUB WANT TO GO, AND HOW ARE YOU GETTING THERE?

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As a leader, and as a member, of a national, state, or local beekeeping association what do you need to want your beekeeping association to do? As nonprofit member associations the main objective of the organization is to serve its members. Beekeeping associations cannot exist as they did twenty and thirty years ago. Beekeeping has expanded, beekeepers are diverse, and the public looks to beekeepers to educate others, themselves, policy makers, and fellow stakeholders about the past, present, and future of beekeeping.

Our bee clubs start with vision. Sometimes the vision is provided by one person, and that person runs the club for 30 years. One leader does not a club make. As in all democracies, leaders must change to meet the needs of the club, its members, and in this case our honey bees. Strategic planning helps the beekeeping association look to the future, by examining its past and present. Strategic planning ensures there will be a future to the organization.

It is important for all organizations to invest the necessary time in “crystallizing its ideas, and articulating them on paper.” The vision statement develops through a process called strategic planning. According to a briefing paper by TCC group, a strategic plan is a tool that provides guidance in fulfilling a mission with maximum efficiency and impact.” Strategic plans will define:

- Specific goals
- Action steps to accomplish goals
- Resources needed to meet goals.

Typically, strategic plans are “reviewed and revamped” every three to five years so the current Board understands the role of the organization, and to ensure they are serving their members based on current needs and issues.

For all volunteer, or for those nonprofits with paid staff, an operating plan based on the strategic plan will define the responsibilities for the goals, assigning tasks to specific people or job titles.

Key to the success of a strategic plan is acknowledgement of it by the Board. If the Board does not participate in its development, and the Board does not take action with the strategic plan, then it will fail. Volunteer work is still work! It takes time, effort, thought, understanding, compromise, attention to detail, and a sense of humor. Leaders on the Board and within the membership are all responsible for ensuring the mission of the organization is met. "No organization exists in a static environment. Social, political and economic trends continually impact the demand for its offerings and services." To develop strategy the bee club leaders have to understand their past and present, as it affects the future of the association. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the beekeeping association must be discussed, examined, and analyzed. It is important for bee club leaders to begin the strategic planning process as a group effort. No one should expect to just state, "this is what we should do," as they will have to back up that idea with a proposal, a budget, a timeline, and be prepared to lead the project. Board members are supposed to work together. Bee club Boards are "little democracies," so everyone has their job to do, and everyone needs to work together for the common good of serving the mission and the members of the beekeeping association.

"No matter how relevant its original mission, no organization can afford to stand still. It must work to stay relevant if it is to survive. A strategic plan can help bee clubs secure new opportunities, address its weaknesses or problems, and provide for growth of the bee club. "A strategic plan is not a wish list," but it can help the organization "determine where it wants to go and chart a course to get there." Facilitators can help guide the strategic planning process. Current Board leaders or beekeeping association members should not facilitate their own strategic planning process. They need to be able to contribute to the discussion, and they cannot if they are a neutral facilitator. A facilitator for your strategic planning meeting will:

- Use time efficiently
- Help the group define its overall goal
- Listen actively
- Use silence effectively
- Ask questions
- Paraphrase to clarify
- Synthesize ideas
- Give and receive feedback
- Encourage full participation
- Test assumptions
- Collect ideas
- Identify objectives and plans
- Take accurate notes
- Promote mutual understanding
- Foster inclusive solutions
- Teach new thinking skills
- Summarize clearly
- Stay on track

Most importantly, the facilitator will leave the organization with tools that you can use to move forward on your goals, ideas, and plans. Depending upon the contracted time with the facilitator, they typically will not write your entire plan. The beekeeping association must continue to work on the process, determine its activities and action plan past the initial learning stage with the facilitator. This is why it is important to have leaders on the Beekeeping Board who can and will work with each
Create a “roadmap” to develop the ideas/projects/goals.

Analyze the organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

Understand the organization’s operating environment

Define success; be accountable

Learn from experience

Increase impact using a variety of tools

Data supported decision making

Develop strong board/volunteer relationship

Organizational Vision

Understanding the need to plan

Hive picture from Two Men and a Little Farm, the text at the side is from Michele Colopy.

other to examine goals for year two, three and five for the organization. One Board member cannot do it all for the club. Even twenty percent of the Board cannot do eighty percent of the work. Five elements comprise a strategic plan, and it takes the entire Board to work together to:

1-define the mission, vision, activities, and values
2-scan the environment for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the organization
3-identify and prioritize strategic issues
4-define strategic goals and objectives
5-establish an implementation plan and schedule

Once the Board has “scanned the environment,” they need to discuss and analyze the report. The analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats will help the Board “decide which of those conditions or situations are having the greatest impact on its ability to fulfill the vision of the organization, and which opportunities must be capitalized upon immediately to achieve the organizational vision.” A facilitator is most helpful here, so weaknesses or threats do not become personal. It is important for Boards to be realistic, and continually focus on the mission of the organization and, in the case of beekeeping associations, that the need to serve the membership is first and foremost. Additionally, the Board (and members) need to be realistic in their goals for the beekeeping club; “stick to what you can change, if change is needed, and be realistic in that assessment.”

Board members of state, and local beekeeping associations, function as a democracy. The President of the Board often sets the “tone” of the Board: expectations of fellow Board members, encouragement of new ideas, support for those members who initiate their good ideas, as well as a sense of belonging, responsibility, professionalism, maturity, and most importantly, mission-focused. The Board serves the mission of the beekeeping club, and thereby the membership. A strategic plan will help provide the Board and future Board members with the guidance they need to fulfill the mission of the beekeeping association.

The Pollinator Stewardship Council has begun working with state beekeeping associations to facilitate their strategic planning process. If your state association seeks to serve its members, meet your mission, and help to build new leaders in your organization, a strategic plan is important. Contact the Pollinator Stewardship Council with your questions, concerns, or interest in strategic planning for your beekeeping association at info@pollinatorstewardship.org

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2. Ibid., page 2
3. Ibid, page 2
4. Ibid, page 9
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
8. Effective Strategic Planning, page 7, The Enterprise Foundation
9. Ibid, page 11
10. Ibid