CHAPTER STRATEGIC PLANNING GUIDE

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Accounting & Financial Women's Alliance

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The Importance of Planning

Most AFWA members are familiar with some sort of planning. It may have been called business planning, or strategic planning, or long range planning. Regardless of the name it's given, the planning process is a valuable one to any organization. In your chapter, just going through the basics of planning will:

1. Help the chapter focus on specific goals and objectives to ensure an orderly transition of leadership and consistent programming.

2. Create another way for members to get involved in chapter activities. This occurs when, during the planning process, members are asked for their input and ideas.

3. Force leaders to make an in-depth analysis of the chapter's programs and services.

4. Assist in recruitment efforts (because it shows prospective members where the chapter is going.

5. Reflect the sound management practices used by many chapter members' employment firms.

One question often asked is, "How long into the future does the plan go?" There is no one answer that is appropriate for all chapters. In general, a two to three year plan is recommended because it is difficult to project beyond that time frame for most chapters.

A Step-by-Step Approach to Chapter Planning

1. Gathering Information

Before beginning the actual planning for the chapter you need to accumulate as much information as possible. This information should be in the following areas:

A. Historical Information

Gather as many facts about your chapter as possible. What has your membership growth been? Has the "mix" of you membership changed? How has attendance at chapter meetings been growing (or declining)? What programs, speakers and/or topics have attracted the highest numbers?

B. "Environmental" Information

What is the general economic situation in your chapter's area? What is predicted over the next one to two years? What is the status of major employers (are they hiring or cutting back)? What organizations are considered "competitors" for your chapter in terms of membership and resources (CPA societies, women's professional groups, etc.)?

C. Member Needs Information

This is the most critical information to gather. It makes no sense to put a plan together that supports programs and services no one wants. Each chapter is unique and the plan you establish should match the makeup of your membership as much as possible. By gathering this information, the chapter also ensures a way to compare what the "leadership" thinks the chapter should be doing with what the general membership thinks it should be doing.

Some methods for gathering information on member needs include:

1. Written Surveys
   This is traditionally the way most organizations gather member information. The difficult part is getting enough response to validate the information.

2. Focus Groups
   This technique is used to gather qualitative, rather than quantitative, information. By actually sitting down with small groups of members the chapter can identify general areas of concern. Please remember that information gathered through focus groups cannot be "projected" for statistical purposes (i.e., if six of eight focus group participants say that

continuing professional education is their main concern, you cannot assume that 75 percent of all members feel the same way).

3. Telephone Surveys
This may be the most effective way to gather statistically valid information quickly. By using a short, specific survey and getting answers over the phone, your chapter can gather a representative cross section of opinions in a fairly short time.

2. Designating a Planning Team

The chapter needs to determine who will actually sit down and put the plan together. In many cases, this will be a kind of predetermined leadership group—a board, a group of committee chairs, or a specifically appointed planning committee. Regardless of the group's makeup, it is important to be sure that it is representative of the membership of your chapter. This means that all of the chapter's demographic groups should have some input (either through membership on the planning team or through their input on surveys and focus groups). If a segment of the membership feels that their viewpoint hasn't been included in the plan, they are unlikely to support the final plan.

The number of people on the planning team should be kept to a workable size (no more than ten to twelve people; no less than six to eight). After the planning team has been designated and the appropriate information gathered, a planning session should be held. This session should last from four to eight hours, depending upon the needs of your chapter.

3. The Chapter's Mission

Although some organizations believe the mission statement needs to be some all-encompassing, idealistic tome, this is not necessarily the case. Since AFWA has spent so much time establishing its mission statement, the mission of the chapters should be one that is easy to identify and communicate. All AFWA chapters should strive to accomplish the following universal mission:

"The mission of the chapter is to serve its members by supporting the goals and objectives of AFWA through effective programs and services."

4. Identifying General Objectives

Once the mission of the chapter is established, the next step is to identify specific objectives that help the chapter accomplish this mission. An objective is a statement that clarifies what the chapter is trying to achieve in major program areas. These objectives should reflect the fact that the chapter is answering the needs of the members as established in the information-gathering process. An example of how objectives can be stated is:

The chapter will strive to accomplish its mission through effective programming in the following areas of concentration:

- *Continuing Education*
- *Effective Chapter Meetings*
- *Member Communications*
- *Public Relations*
- *Membership Development*
- *Competent Chapter Management*

For each of the areas identified, a statement is needed explaining exactly what the objectives of the area are. Some examples include:

A. Continuing Education:

   The objective is to provide high quality, reasonably priced continuing education programs which meet the needs of the chapter's membership.

B. Effective Chapter Meetings:

   The objective is to attract the highest possible number of members to chapter meetings by offering high quality, useful and enjoyable programs.

C. Membership Development:

   The objective is to attract (and keep) the highest possible number of members over the next two years.

5. Establishing Measurement Criteria and Goals

Once objectives are established, many organizations move into the "implementation strategy" part of the plan. But there is an area that needs to be determined before the actual goal-accomplishment steps can be discussed. This step is to determine how the chapter will measure itself. For example, if your goal is to "attract the highest possible number of members to chapter meetings," how do you know when you've accomplished that? What determines if a meeting is "useful?" Planners must first establish how they will measure their performance, then put together action plans to meet the measurement criteria. If the criteria are established properly, meeting the criteria will accomplish the objectives—and the mission—of the chapter. Here are some samples of how measurement criteria can be established from some objectives:

A. Membership Development:

The objective is to attract and keep the highest possible number of members over the next two years.

Measurement Criteria (in order of importance):

1. Annual retention rate
2. Number of new members
3. Net growth vs. other chapters of same size
4. Market penetration (percentage of members vs. number eligible to join)

B. Effective Chapter Meetings:

The objective is to attract the highest possible number of members to chapter meetings by offering high quality, useful and enjoyable programs.

Measurement Criteria (in order of importance)

1. Total meeting attendance (annually)
2. Attendee evaluation scores
3. Attendee mix (public practice, industry, government, etc.)
4. Repeat attendees
5. Number of attendees per firm.

Once the measurement criteria are established, chapters can determine their current status and set goals for the future. For example:

Measurement Criteria: Total Meeting Attendance (annually)
(**<u>NOTE</u>:** Can also be done on a per meeting basis)
Current Measurement (2014): 300
<u>Goal</u>: 2015, Ten [10%] percent increase (330)
2016, Five [5.0%] percent increase over 1997 (347)

Measurement Criteria: Attendee Evaluation Scores
Current Measurement (2014): 7.5 average (out of a possible 10)
<u>Goal</u>: 2015 - 8.0
2016 - 9.0

A note about goal setting…

When establishing specific goals, it's very important to keep in mind that you are a ***volunteer*** organization. Your goals should be set with a realization that there are limitations on your chapter. Be sure that you consider the following when establishing specific program goals:

- Are the goals ***realistic***?
- Are the goals ***achievable*** (given the resources and history of your chapter)?
- Are the goals ***challenging*** enough so that some real effort is required?
- Are the goals ***measurable***?
- Are the goals ***meaningful*** (will accomplishing them truly help the chapter move forward)?

Don't just make up numbers so that the plan looks complete. If the goals are unrealistic, you'll have trouble getting leaders and other members to commit to them, and you'll be setting your chapter up for disappointment. On the other hand, if the goals are not challenging enough, even attaining them leaves members with little satisfaction.

6. Suggested Implementation Steps

Now comes the part that everyone considers "the plan" — the part of the process where activities are suggested to help meet the measurement criteria established above. To have suggested activities prior to this point would have been just that—a list of activities. Now that measurement criteria have been established, the planning team can concentrate on suggesting activities with an identifiable objective in mind.

It's important to note that any number of ideas will come up to accomplish each goal. The planning team needs to put these suggestions in some type of priority order, since it is unlikely the chapter will have the financial and/or human resources to implement every idea.

Here are some examples of implementation strategies:

Measurement Criteria: Attendance at Chapter Meetings
Current Measurement (2014): 300
Goal: 2015 - 330
Suggested implementation strategies (in order of priority):

A. Begin having door prizes and incentives (drawings for free educational programs, etc.)

B. Reduced meeting fees when attending more than four [4] meetings per year

C. Move meetings to other locations

D. Targeted phone calls to least active members each month

E. Earlier mailing of meeting notices

7. Timetables and Responsibilities

Into how much detail should the planning team go? A good question. If the planning team is going to get into the day-by-day implementation of every step of the plan little time will be left for others to do or to provide input for. It is recommended that the planning team identify the areas of concentration, the objectives, the measurement criteria and the goals, then begin ***suggesting*** some implementation strategies and timetables. It is normally best to give the person or committee assigned to carry out the strategies some flexibility and ownership within the process. Many groups will present the implementation part of the plan to a specific committee and then the committee returns its suggested timetable to the planning team by a certain date. This assures input from the committee and retains control of the process and focus of the plan.

The following is an example of how an implementation plan might look:

Measurement Criteria: Attendance at Chapter Meetings
Goal: 2015 - 330 (annual)
Implementation Strategy:
Develop an attendance incentive program
Assigned to: Program Committee

Implementation Timetable:

A. Identify areas of need and report to Board by February 1.

B. Develop a suggested list of incentives and recommend to Board by February 15.

C. Have incentives determined and budgeted for by March 1.

D. Begin promotion of incentive program by March 15.

E. Begin program by April meeting.

8. Stating Assumptions

Part of the actual written plan should include a statement of "assumptions" that the planning team made when the plan was developed. These assumptions reflect what the planning team believes the environment will be for chapter activities over the next few years. The assumptions here should reflect some of the information gathered at the beginning of the planning process. Adding these assumptions to the planning document alleviates some concern from members that the planning team did (or did not) take certain concerns into consideration when developing the plan. A sample of some of these assumptions might include:

A. Employers in the chapter area will continue downsizing thus reducing the number of potential members and dollars for AFWA support.

B. General economic conditions will improve slightly.

C. More and more members will want information available electronically.

D. Time constraints on members will continue to increase their demand for worthwhile meetings and programs.

9. Monitoring Progress and Making Adjustments

Very few plans will end up being carried out exactly as they are written. No one can foresee all the things that can affect the ability of the chapter leaders to carry out the plan. This is one reason why stating assumptions is important. As things change, the planning team needs to revisit the plan to ensure it is still a practical tool, given these changes. For example, if the economy picks up unexpectedly or a new employer relocates to the chapter area, the membership goals may then actually be too low (of course, the reverse could also be true).

Chapters should set specific times to review and monitor its implementation progress. At first, chapters may want to do this quarterly to ensure all those assigned to implement the plan are on schedule. In addition, it is important to assign an ***individual***, such as the president-elect, to be responsible for monitoring the plan. These plan reviews should take no more than an hour, and can usually be done as part of an extended board meeting.

10. Keeping the Planning Process Moving

If the chapter is monitoring the process effectively, the plan can become an ongoing management tool. Each year, at the beginning of the year, the chapter should update the plan in several ways:

A. Review any assumptions to see if they are still valid.

B. Adjust goals up or down as necessary.

C. Add goals and plans for new programs or issues that have come up during the previous year.

D. Determine if any changes are required in who should have implementation responsibility for various plan aspects.

E. Extend the plan another year by setting goals for the next appropriate year and adding new programs/activities.

F. Determine if new data (updated member surveys, etc.) is needed.

Chapter Planning Session

Facilitator's Guide

The purpose of this guide is to assist the person assigned to facilitate the actual planning session for the chapter. The guide has been developed with the assumption that the session will be a one-half to one full day session (four to eight hours). The actual time will depend upon the needs and desires of the group and how much communication and information is shared prior to the actual session. For example, if some member surveys have been done, the results should be sent to the planning group prior to the planning session. This will save time at the session and allow participants to use the survey results in their planning considerations.

1. **Gathering/Welcoming**
   Approximate Time: 15-20 minutes
   Materials: Name tags, place cards, any activity-related materials

   Some type of informal gathering time is necessary to get all of the planning team comfortable with each other. It is suggested that an icebreaker exercise be used during this time. The icebreaker could be something as simple as solving a puzzle or asking each person to introduce herself and add to the introduction one interesting fact (favorite movie, greatest fear, etc.). This will allow participants to feel a little more familiar with each other and get them used to participating with the group. This type of exercise is especially important if the planning group is not a pre-existing group, such as a board.

2. **Setting the Stage**
   Approximate Time: 5-10 minutes
   Materials: Flip chart and marker

   The facilitator should give an overview of how the process will work; what the ground rules will be; the timing of various parts of the planning meeting. It might be helpful to list some of these on the flip chart (written out before the meeting). Some of the things you will want to emphasize are:

   - There are **NO** wrong ideas
   - The process only works if everyone participates
   - In the event of disagreements the facilitator acts as mediator
   - To keep the meeting flowing smoothly the facilitator will time activities

   It is important during this part of the session to remind attendees of the purposes of the session, which are to establish a plan that can be used to manage the chapter effectively over the next two to three years. This is NOT a session for individual agendas or to establish chapter policies. Be sure to tell the attendees that their job is not to determine every single activity needed to implement the plan, but to give guidance and suggestions to those people who will be assigned to implement it.

3. **Review of AFWA Strategic Plan**
   Approximate Time: 5-10 minutes
   Materials: Copies of the AFWA Plan

   Since support of the AFWA objectives is a large part of the chapter's mission, it is important that AFWA's plan be discussed and reviewed. This doesn't mean that the chapter plan should be a miniature AFWA plan. It *does* mean that somewhere in the chapter plan there should be an acknowledgment of AFWA's objectives and mission.

4. **Review of Information Gathered**
   Approximate Time: 15-20 minutes
   Materials: Historical information, member needs information

   Much of this information can be distributed to the planning team prior to the planning conference. This section of the meeting should be spent validating the information gathered so that it can be considered when establishing specific goals later in the planning process. Remind participants that this information does not *require* them to take any specific action; however, this information, especially any member input gathered through surveys or focus groups, needs to be acknowledged when presenting the final plan to the chapter members.

5. **Establishment of Areas of Concentration**
   Approximate Time: 5-10 minutes
   Materials: Previous plans, current survey information

   The planning team next needs to identify those key program areas that are critical to the chapter's success. These areas typically include membership growth, chapter meetings/programs, education/technical, public relations, student activities, chapter administration, member communications (newsletter, etc.). These areas may have been established in previous plans or may reflect the areas designated on member surveys.

6. **Determination of Measurement Criteria**
   Approximate Time: 45-60 minutes
   Materials: Flip chart(s), markers, planning worksheets

   In each of the areas of concentration, the planning team needs to identify at least two to three measurement criteria. If the group is large enough (over ten), consider dividing the group into two smaller groups. This will increase individual participation and give each person a chance to express opinions in a smaller, less intimidating setting. The facilitator should then ask the participants to prioritize the measurement criteria in order of their importance to the chapter. On the flip charts, compile the information and determine a group listing and ranking. Any reasonable method for doing this is acceptable (i.e., averaging, voting, etc.). If done in two or more groups, get each group's list and priority order, then determine the entire group's list. Note the top two to three measurement criteria for each area of concentration and focus on accomplishing goals in those areas. List any further measurement criteria and note that these criteria will be used after the top priorities have been addressed.

7. **Goal Setting Session**
   Approximate Time: 5-10 minutes per area of concentration
   Materials: Historical data, current status of each area, flip charts

   For each measurement criteria, the planning team should identify the current status (if possible) then establish a goal for 2001 and 2002. These can be specific goals (i.e., 30 new members) or a goal in relation to current performance (i.e., ten [10%] percent increase). To keep this part of the session orderly, the attendees can address one area at a time. If using more than one group, each group can go through all areas and the facilitator can total up all of the group rankings.

8. **Implementation Strategies**
   Approximate Time: 1-2 hours
   Materials: Flip charts

   The facilitator needs to guide the planning team to suggest at least one to two specific steps the chapter can take to achieve each measurement criteria. It is not imperative that the planning team outline every step of every strategy. It is recommended that the details of implementation strategies be left to the appropriate committees or individuals. This is the part of the planning process where the attendees really need to use their intuition, experience, and creativity. The facilitator needs to keep a close watch on the timing of this process. Watch for the group getting bogged down with too much detail (such as timing, personalities, etc.) and spending too much time on any one area.

   The facilitator should ask for suggested implementation strategies in both existing programs (ways to improve) and at least one new program or idea for each area of concentration. There needn't be a lot of discussion about programs with which members/leaders have expressed a lot of satisfaction. Concentrate on things that the chapter will do differently (or better) to improve its value to members.

Watch for signs of mental and physical fatigue. There can be a tendency by this point in the planning session for people's attention span to shorten. This can lead to the group adopting ideas quickly "to get it over with." Be sure to take necessary breaks.

9. Assignment of Responsibilities
Approximate Time: 15-30 minutes
Materials: Flip charts, organizational chart, job descriptions

The planning team should decide which of the chapter's committees or individuals will be responsible for carrying out the implementation steps. Within general time frames established by the planning team, the actual timetable for implementation should be left to the assigned committee. One thing that should be established is when the assigned committee or individual will report back to the board with an implementation plan and timetable.

10. Review of Plan, Validation and Communication
Approximate Time: 10-15 minutes (at meeting)
Materials: Flip charts

Before adjourning the meeting the facilitator should review all decisions made and quickly review/summarize the plan. Attendees should be encouraged to note any disagreements with the draft version of the plan at this point. This doesn't mean personal disagreements with decisions made (those should have been handled during the decision-making process) but any disagreement with the facilitator's presentation of what the group decided. It is important that all attendees feel that the process was fair and representative of the viewpoints expressed.

After the session someone should be assigned to send a draft version of the plan to all attendees and to get their agreement to it. It can then be finalized and forwarded to any necessary approving body (board, executive committee, etc.).

Once the plan is officially adopted, both the plan and the process should be communicated to the chapter membership. This can be done through a president's column in the chapter newsletter, a special communication to members, or at a monthly membership meeting.

AFWA Chapter Planning Program Checklist

Assigned to	Activity/Function	Completed
_________	Information Gathering	_____
	-Member Surveys	_____
	-Focus Groups	_____
	-Telephone Interviews	_____
	-Other Sources	_____
_________	Planning Team Designated	_____
_________	Date Set for Planning Conference	_____
_________	Information Summaries Sent to Planning Team for Review	_____
_________	Planning Conference Held	_____
	-Review of Information & AFWA Plan	_____
	-Agreement on Chapter Mission	_____
	-Identification of General Objectives	_____
	-Establishment of Measurement Criteria and Goals	_____
	-Suggested Implementation Steps	_____
	-Timetables & Responsibilities	_____
	-Statement of Assumptions	_____
_________	Draft Plan to Attendees for Changes/Approval	_____
_________	Communication of Plan to Full Membership	_____
_________	Six Month Progress Review	_____

Sample Chapter Planning Worksheet

Area of Concentration.....Membership Development

Objective.........................Attract and keep as many members as possible over the next two years

Measurement Criteria
1. Net growth
2. Member retention

Current Measurements
1. Thirty [30] members
2. Eighty-four [84%] percent (2016)

Goals 1999
1. Ten [10%] percent growth (33 total)
2. Eighty-seven [87%] percent retention

Goals 2000
1. Ten [10%] percent growth (36 total)
2. Ninety [90%] percent retention

Suggested Implementation Strategies
1. Net growth
   a. Institute a *Member-Get-A-Member* campaign
   b. Give free meals to any member bringing a prospect
   c. Send at least one solicitation letter per quarter to prospects

2. Retention
   a. Send pre-renewal letter from chapter president
   b. Make monthly calls to least active members
   c. Add a "recognition" column to each chapter newsletter

ASSIGNED TO: Membership Committee

Chapter Planning Worksheet

Area of Concentration ____

Objective(s) ____

____

Current Measurements

____

____

Goals [Year 1]

____

____

Goals [Year 2]

____

____

Suggested Implementation Strategies

1. **Current Program Improvements**

   ____

   ____

2. **New Initiatives/Programs**

   ____

   ____

ASSIGNED TO ________________________________

Handful of Icebreakers

Objective: To help participants become acquainted with, and feel comfortable about, each other early in a session.

Procedure

1. Pair up participants. Instruct them to interview each other about:

   a. Three unusual things that have happened in their lives.

   b. Special talents or hobbies they have.

   c. The two most important job responsibilities that they have.

   d. The person they most admire (or despise) in the world. Why?

   e. A color and an animal that best describe who they are and how they feel.

2. Ask each member of the group to introduce herself as she thinks her best friend would—her likes and dislikes, recreational interests, personal aspirations, etc.

3. Ask each member to examine and describe what is in her name. She should tell her full name, any nickname or abbreviation, who she was named after and whether she likes or dislikes her name. What other name would she choose if she had the opportunity? Why?

4. Procure a softball (tennis ball or sponge-construction ball). Arrange the participants in a circle. Throw the ball to one person and ask that individual to disclose something unusual about herself. Then have the ball thrown to another and repeat the process. Only upon the second receipt of the ball should the player tell her first name.

5. Prior to the session, survey (by phone or letter) the participants to discover various information such as hobbies, job titles, major accomplishments, self-descriptive adjectives, etc. Prepare a brief synopsis of each (name should be deleted) and distribute to the group at the beginning of the session. After the first coffee break, invite everyone to fill in the names they believe match the surveys. Provide the "key" to help them complete the form.