

Main Pitfalls of Planning

The main pitfall from which all others derive is falling into the delusion that planning can determine outcome.

- **PLANNING IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE INFORMATION ON WHICH IT IS BASED.** Too often, groups rely on untested assumptions or hunches, erecting their plans on unsteady ground.
- **PLANNING ISN'T MAGIC: YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT.** Frequently, organizations contemplating new initiatives begin by writing the last page of their plans, the one where everyone lives happily ever after. But the process of planning is one of research and investigation. Considering a major expansion of activity means taking stock of organizational readiness in many ways. Is there an audience or constituency? Do you have access to the policymakers? The material resources? The time required to do it right? Planning is a tool that can help you decide whether to go forward, not just how. If the answers to key questions are "no," then the outcome of planning should be to postpone the contemplated expansion, working toward readiness to tackle it farther down the road.
- **PLANS ARE ADAPTABLE.** An organization isn't an artifact to be set in place with planks and nails. In contrast to a construction project, organization-building is never complete; an organization's choices are to continuously adapt or die. Rather than planning as if the future were pre-determined, plan for flexibility. Plans that can't be changed shouldn't be written.
- **PUT PLANNING IN ITS PLACE AND TIME.** Some groups don't recognize that it takes time and effort to plan well. They want the results but aren't able or willing to make the investment. They end up in the worst of both worlds: their ongoing work is set back because they took time to plan without thinking through the implications and their too-rushed plans end up meaningless. Be realistic about what you can invest. Find a way to plan that suits your available resources -- time, energy, money.
- **GROUPS CAN BE BLINDSIDED BY THE ISSUES THAT PLANNING REVEALS.** There's a mollifying rhythm to the daily grind, as diligence, deadlines, and distractions keep tensions and conflicts at bay. When an organization pauses to plan, what's been submerged may come up for air. When an organization undertakes to plan, everyone should be made aware that issues may arise that need talking through, that there may be moments of heat, struggle, even head-on collision. Your planning process should include the time, focus, and talent for the mediation needed to resolve such conflicts, so you can turn to face the future as a team.
- **WRITING IT UP IN PLANSPEAK RATHER THAN PLAIN LANGUAGE UNDOES THE GOOD OF PLANNING.** Sometimes organizations have great face-to-face planning experiences: good discussions, moments of profound insight, the excitement of contemplating future possibility, the elation of a meeting of the minds. But feelings don't last long: they need to be carried forward into action, guided by a written plan. Some planning documents are written so vaguely, abstract, and general, they're useless to the people who invested so much in their development. As time goes by and the memory of the face-to-face experience fades, the planning document's generalities are drained of any meaning that might once have clung to them. If you are going to take the time to plan, talk through alternative scenarios for realizing your aims; map out ways to test them; **be concrete** about deadlines, and evaluation methods. Put enough flesh on the bare bones of your plans to keep the document alive and kicking or it will be buried in a drawer before the ink has dried.

Sources:

[Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations](#)

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[Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits -- Strategic Planning](#)

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