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Strategic Planning Needs Analysis for a Rural Combination Fire Department

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and the appropriate credit given where I used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _____

Abstract

This applied research project sought to explore what strategic planning is and what models are available for implementation. The problem is the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department does not have an instrument to manage organizational change and is consistently faced with reactive adaptation to an ever-changing environment. The purpose of this research is to identify elements of a strategic plan for the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department to evaluate for implementation. This descriptive research was accomplished through a comprehensive literature review to answer the following research questions:

1. What is strategic planning?
2. What strategic planning processes or models are most effective and why?
3. What is the most appropriate strategic planning model for the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department?

The literature review consisted of a review of journals, existing strategic plans, web based content, books, and applied research projects related to the topic of strategic planning. In the literature review, the researcher found relative examples of strategic planning models, recommended formats, and methodology for proper development and implementation.

The research recommended that the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department select and implement an appropriate yet sustainable strategic planning process to manage organizational change.

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Introduction

Society is in constant change and the effects are consistently evident in all levels of fire service organization management and planning. The management of change requires focused planning and poses challenges for fire service leaders and the application of proven methods is essential to insure productive yet stabilized progress. The author, as fire chief of a rural combination fire department, has determined that the use of established planning processes is now, more than ever before, necessary for organizational success. The gap exists in which way to proceed to achieve effective planning. Is it possible to know where you want to go when the available routes of travel are always being rerouted and resurfaced?

The problem is the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department does not have an instrument to manage organizational change and is consistently faced with reactive adaptation to an ever-changing environment. The purpose of this research is to identify elements of a strategic plan for the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department to evaluate for implementation. This descriptive research will be accomplished by answering the following questions:

1. What is strategic planning?
2. What strategic planning processes or models are most effective and why?
3. What is the most appropriate strategic planning model for the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department?

Background and Significance

The Stony Hill Rural Fire Department was incorporated in 1958 by a dedicated group of concerned citizens from the Stony Hill Community and New Light Township, located in Northern Wake County, North Carolina. As the nearest fire protection was almost 8 miles away in the Town of Wake Forest, serious delays in service were identified by the organizational

founders. A two bay wooden building was constructed and two surplus military apparatus were acquired as the first fire trucks. In 1963, a new three-bay masonry block station was erected one-quarter of a mile away from the original facility. The department continued to slowly develop over the next two decades with gradual improvements in apparatus and equipment however the service delivery was unchanged. In 1984, a Medical First Responder program was implemented to assist with medical emergencies in the community. The nearest ambulance was seven miles away, therefore this service enhancement constituted our first major planned change. Due to community growth, the need for a second station was identified. The funding necessary for the facility and land was made available through gradual operational savings, increased revenues from fundraisers, and the Wake County Fire Services Tax Base. In 1997, Station Two was completed and the department was capable of extending and improving its services to the residents in the western parts of our existing district.

The organization initiated another significant change in September 1998. Two part time firefighters were employed weekdays to assist our response to daily emergencies. Until this point, all services were provided by volunteer members, but due to the diminishing volunteer response during the weekdays, the implementation was a necessity for service delivery. Stony Hill was now a combination fire department. In August 1999, three additional part time positions were added for a total of five positions daily. In 2001, a full-time captain was employed to assist with staff management.

In 2003, a unique opportunity was offered by Wake County. A headquarters facility was proposed for our non-profit organization whereby the facility would be owned by Wake County, however the organization would occupy the facility through a utilization agreement. This change set the stage for “county owned” facilities yet non-profit corporate fire department occupation.

This association has been successful thus far and has served as a model for other fire departments in Wake County. The new facility now serves as our headquarters station and we are also collocated with a Wake County Emergency Medical Services paramedic ambulance and staff. 2006 marked the introduction of twenty-four hour shift based personnel and two personnel were employed per shift. In 2008, one additional full time firefighter was employed for a total of three per shift. We also celebrated our 50th anniversary in the same year.

Our current emergency services include fire protection for our community in the form of fire suppression, investigation, fire prevention, and public education. The organization also provides emergency medical care through our medical first responder program; and performs rescue in the form of extrication of trapped or pinned persons involved in vehicle accidents. As with most fire departments, we also assist local officials and agencies with any additional emergency requests for assistance.

With so much apparent historical change, it is evident that thought was given to the needs of the community and the services provided, however no structured planning process was ever developed or implemented. Decisions were made with minimal planning and typically in a reactive fashion. As the operation of the organization ventured into the new and uncharted areas of paid personnel and services expansion, managerial and leadership stress increased. Although good intent has prevailed by all persons involved with these expansion processes, solid and informed management of the change was not apparent. A proper strategic planning process now considered as necessary for the future productive efforts of the organization.

This research project will address the U.S. Fire Administration's Operational Objective of "improving local preparedness and planning" and expound on the "change management" component of the Executive Fire Officer, Executive Development course. The research will seek

to expose the strategic planning process for consideration by the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department.

Literature Review

The literature review consisted of a review of journals, existing strategic plans, web based content, books, and applied research projects related to the topic of strategic planning. In the literature review, the researcher found relative examples of strategic planning models, recommended formats, and proven methodology for proper development and implementation.

The literature review focuses on gathering and reviewing information relevant to the research questions:

1. What is strategic planning?
2. What strategic planning processes or models are most effective and why?
3. What is the most appropriate strategic planning model for the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department?

Frank L. Fire (1997) describes strategic planning process as one of self-examination where the process may be difficult however beneficial when it is complete. The self-examination is based upon identified questions that the organization must answer to progress in the strategic planning process. It is recommended that the process be led by a facilitator to insure compliance with the issue and topic at hand. One initial question for an organization to answer is “where are we now?” This reflective self-assessment, although simple in perspective, may be very revealing in the establishment of the organization’s true current status. Fire (1997) establishes these questions as essential for the self-assessment process:

1. What do we do as an organization?
2. What is the organization’s vision statement?

3. What services do we provide?
4. Who do we serve?
5. What are the trends related to our services?
6. Are we keeping up with the changes related to the trends?
7. How have we performed in the past?
8. What has our financial status been?
9. What are our internal capabilities and limitations?

These questions represent a starting point in the determination of the organizations current status. It represents the building blocks for productive strategic planning (Fire, 1997).

Mark Wallace (2006) elaborates on the external and internal environmental factors of the organization as influences affecting the strategic planning process. He states:

The fire department exists to serve our community, our external environment, not to provide and adequate income or a rewarding career for the members of our department.

The driving force in a for-profit business is its internal environment. The external environment drives our internal environment. Understanding the difference is one of the critical success factors of effective fire department strategic planning. (p.77)

In order to effectively evaluate the environmental dynamics of an organization, a basic process known as a SWOT analysis should be performed. The SWOT analysis is widely practiced in business and consists of an evaluation of an organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). These four elements focus on five aspects:

1. The macro environment
2. The industry environment
3. The competitive environment

4. The customer environment
5. The internal organizational environment

Wallace (2006) concludes that the SWOT is a functional practice in business, however it has limitations in the fire service due to the prevailing focus on the external environment. He describes these limitations as a contrasting perspective where the external environment is an element that the fire department has little control over. Only one of the five environments is internally oriented thus the focus of the SWOT analysis used in strategic planning should be aligned with the internal environment of an organization for conclusive results (Wallace, 2006).

Rouson (2005) also describes strategic planning as different from typical business planning. She states:

Strategic planning is indeed different from business planning. Strategic plans are the road maps that guide an organization forward, answering questions about mission and values as well as what results the organization wants to achieve in the area of program, management/operations, sustainability, and governance. Strategic plans set the course.

(p.1)

The Alliance for Nonprofit Management defines strategic planning as:

Strategic planning is a management tool, period. As with any management tool, it is used for one purpose only: to help an organization do a better job –to focus its energy, to ensure that members of the organization are working toward the same goals, to assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. In short, strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future.

(p.1)

The planning process is strategic as it enables the organization to respond to changing conditions related to its environment (<http://www.allianceonline.org>).

Barr and Eversole (2003) describe strategic planning as master planning and indicate that it should initially include three phases using an established fire prevention model prescribed by the NFPA (Barr and Eversole 2003, p 1016):

1. Preplanning
2. Planning
3. Implementation

The preplanning phase is when necessary initial supportive elements are composed and assembled. These contributory components may be varied committees, cost projections, administrative approvals, and commitments. The planning phase consists of the efforts to gather, review, and analyze information that will constitute the plan. In this phase, goals and objectives are determined and the levels of organizational involvement are identified. An essential assessment of the services provided is also performed to establish a benchmark for plan development and the plan is assembled with these components. The final phase is implementation. Implementation is when the plan is projected to the organization and its stakeholders. Implementation is a never ending phase where constant evaluation is maintained and the plan is revised as necessary to meet organizational needs. The NFPA model establishes master planning as a participative process the results in a long-term, goal oriented, and comprehensive plan for fire prevention activities (Barr and Eversole 2003).

Barr and Eversole (2003) also state the strategic planning process is an evolution of the previously described fire prevention model component of “planning” and is very focused on the organization’s mission. Their recommended strategic planning component model is:

1. Mission statement applicability
2. Environmental evaluation
3. Determining organizational factors
4. Establish organizational objectives
5. Objective implementation
6. Continued review and evaluation of the established plan

Within this model are recommended methods that will guide the fire service manager.

First, human resources must be considered as valuable input and feedback is needed from both the internal customers of the organization and the external partners of the community. As many emergency managers may not be familiar with the formal processes of planning, external assistance is recommended for effective development. Managerial participation and oversight is also essential for focus and control during the process. Without management audit, the process may overlook critical issues regarding the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities (Ross, 1995). In the fire service, the fire chief is overall responsible for the strategic plan (Compton and Granito, 2002). Barr and Eversole (2003) also include the identification of the internal and external pressures affecting the department. These pressures originate from affirmative action, diversity of the workforce, and differences in employees.

Strategic planning is described as a cyclical process with five primary steps by Michael Touchstone, Chief of EMS in Philadelphia. He describes the steps as:

1. Stakeholder identification
2. Articulation and sharing of a vision for the future
3. Environmental scanning
4. Setting goals and objectives

5. Evaluating outcomes

Touchstone (2009) cautions readers that the plan is a living document and should not be shelved when the process reaches an end. All effort is wasted if the outcome is shelved (Touchstone, 2009).

Compton and Granito in *Managing Fire and Rescue Services* states strategic planning is “a road map to the future.” Compton and Granito elaborates that the strategic plan is reflective of the organization’s budget and the plan development and revisions should be aligned with the department’s mission statement. They also state the mission statement is foundation of the plan and is the first step in the development of the plan (Compton and Granito, 2002). These strategic plan components or steps are illustrated as:

1. Analysis of internal and external environments (SWOT approach) using small groups of organizational members.
2. Review mission statement and revise if necessary.
3. Identify common themes within the responses from the SWOT analysis.
4. Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from an operational standpoint.
5. Set goals, objectives, and timetables.
6. Implement the plan.
7. Monitor the plan’s progress.

Compton and Granito’s (2002) strategy relies on a heavy stakeholder involvement. It is encouraged that all levels of the organization be involved in the planning process to enlist buy-in, ownership, and pride. Field personnel are of particular interest as they are the best suited to identify with the needs of the external customers of the organization. Operative staff constitutes

the bulk of the effective implementation of the plan, therefore objectives set forth in the plan document will be carried out by these personnel. If the personnel feel they are part of the change, they will be more willing to accept change (Compton and Granito, 2002).

A very thorough planning process is presented by David Ross (1995). Ross indicates that a strategic plan is a never ending and continuing process that provides a flexible direction for the corporation. Included in his process method are:

1. Environmental scanning
2. Management audit
3. Needs assessment
4. Values clarification
5. Stakeholder analysis
6. Issues analysis
7. Solution alternatives
8. Selecting solutions
9. Establish goals and objectives
10. Action plan for achieving objectives
11. Reality testing
12. Implementation
13. Evaluation and feedback.

Ross' approach is reliant on strong decision making skills and stresses action oriented strategies. Constant monitoring is essential due to a changing internal and external environment and delegation of planning tasks are essential for inclusion of stakeholders (Ross, 1995).

Phillip A. Kouwe (2004) expounds on the traditional reactive behavior of the fire service as it relates to planning. He states that after years of emergency response where reactive performance has been rewarded, a form of involuntary conditioning occurs. This behavior results in leaders and managers placing less emphasis on planning as the fire service seemingly exists predominately as a reactive organization. He continues to elaborate that this planning deficit is becoming more prevalent in some of the fire services leading managers.

Kouwe (2004) indicates that “strategic planning is the process of formulating and implementing decisions about an organization’s future direction.” To aid in the strategic planning process, he adds these four fundamental questions to ask from a department wide perspective:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where are we going?
3. How do we get there?
4. How do we measure our progress?

McNamara (2008) indicates that strategic planning determines where an organization is heading over the next year or more and whether it has reached its goal or not. He also describes that the strategic plan process is determined by the nature of the organization’s culture and may use one of the following models (McNamara, 2006):

1. “Basic” strategic planning
2. Issues based (or Goal based) planning
3. Alignment model planning
4. Scenario based planning
5. Organic (or Self-organizing) planning

Basic strategic planning involves the traditional approaches of identification of purpose, selection of goals, identification of specific strategies to reach the goal, identify specific action plans to implement the strategies, monitor and update the plan as needed (McNamara, 2006).

Issues based planning focuses on the issues or goals that are identified through the SWOT analysis. From this information, major goals and issues are identified and strategies are developed to address these issues. The mission of the organization is adjusted as necessary to meet the evolved organizational goals. An action plan is developed to implement the planning process and budgets are aligned to support the process. Finally, systems to monitor, review, and adjust the plan are created (McNamara, 2006).

The alignment model is designed to provide a strong alignment with the organization's mission and its resources to insure effective operation of the organization (McNamara, 2006). This model may be chosen if there is a large amount of internal issues in the organization. The steps in this model involve:

1. Outlining the organization's mission, purpose, programs, resources, and support elements
2. Identification of what's working well and what's in need of re-alignment
3. Identify how to re-align the deficiencies
4. The adjustments will be established as strategies for the plan

Scenario planning is used in concert with other models to enable strategic thinking. Scenarios are developed to illustrate the external influences of an organization. These scenarios are typically best case, reasonable case, and worst case scenario based. The acknowledgement of the worst case scenario example will provide planners with a much clearer vision of the effects of

the external changes and enable preparation of strategies to address the problem (McNamara, 2006).

The last model is organic or self-organizing planning. This model views the organization as a living organism and the planning process as part of the natural growth of the organization. The approach relies heavily on participative involvement and communication from the planning team I essential. This form takes a more naturalistic approach and requires constant dialogue from the members of the team (McNamara, 2006).

Actual strategic plans from other fire departments provide a great source for evaluation. The Mount Lebanon Fire Department, Pennsylvania provides a simple, yet applicable planning model for evaluation. As a combination fire department, their approach is of particular interest. The department approaches the planning process from a perspective of historical analysis of services, a review of their current capability, and the prediction of future needs. All levels of the organization were involved in the planning process and the use of a SWOC analysis was employed. The SWOC analysis is derived from the traditional SWOT, however the “threats” portion has been creatively replaced with “challenges.” With this change in analytical application, the organization was able to better evaluate the external and internal conditional aspects that would challenge their capabilities and approach the issues from a productive perspective rather than a fearful viewpoint. After the SWOC, the department sought community input through a survey to determine what they perceived the fire departments services. The data obtained from the SWOC analysis and the survey served as the foundation for the establishment of goals and objectives for the strategic plan (Mt. Lebanon, 2009).

The Corvallis Fire Department’s (CFD) strategic plan methodology consists of the following components:

1. Project organization
2. Department assessment
 - a. Department survey
 - b. Department focus groups
 - c. Community surveys
 - d. Public workshop
 - e. Literature review
3. Creation of Goals and Action Items

In the project organization phase, the CFD selected a steering committee that consisted of all levels of formal and informal leaders within the department. The participation also included union and volunteer leadership representatives. Prior to planning process implementation, the elected officials of the jurisdiction were presented the process recommendation for approval to proceed. This action enlisted elected official by-in for support. The department assessment phase sought to involve stakeholders at all levels in the assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the organization. In addition to internal personnel of the organization, community representatives and other local government personnel were included in the vast survey based evaluation. (Corvallis FD, 2009).

The literature review may be summarized as an exploration of the strategic planning process by defining various types of strategic planning methodologies and reviewing existing plans. The researcher identified that scholars provided different definitions of the topic, however the common themes center around collective participation of all stakeholders to formulate a responsive plan for growth and development of the organization. Collective participation will not only enlist by-in and support of the plan due to ownership, but will condition personnel to

think strategically in regards to the organization. The researcher concludes that strategic planning is a structured process that requires an organized preparation and monitored implementation.

Procedures

The desired outcome of this research is to identify information that will contribute to the development of a formal strategic plan for the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department, Inc. As an effective and legitimate strategic plan has not been previously created, the researcher uses the descriptive research method to identify existing types, methods, and applications of strategic planning. The procedures used were a review of various literature related to the subject of strategic planning and compiling of results into this research project using formatting prescribed by the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th edition* (APA, 2007).

The literature review began at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center while in attendance of the Executive Development course. Multiple books, journal articles, and existing applied research papers on the subject were reviewed to determine various types of strategic planning models. Additional research was conducted at the Wake County Library, Wake Forest Branch located in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

Information was also accessed via the internet where the researcher obtained examples of various actual strategic plans from other fire departments. These plans were reviewed for design, ease of reading and understanding, and relation to the information identified in the printed literature previously reviewed. The combined information of existing plans and literature based recommendations provided the basis for the researcher to evaluate several strategic planning models and methods.

Limitations:

Limitations related to the research were noted in the various approaches to the strategic planning process and the varied methods used by fire departments. As most of the information pertained to standardized business practices, the researcher was often required to adapt the information to an emergency services organization perspective. Several of the authors evaluated by the researcher provide a direct relationship of strategic planning to emergency services organizations, while using the business approach as a foundation. The researcher also identified that there existed a vast amount of information related to planning processes, therefore time limitations for access and review were also limiting factors.

Definitions:

APA American Psychological Association (APA). This organization publishes the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The 5th edition is used for this research project. The APA defines rules to be used in the preparation of manuscripts for clear communication (APA, 2007).

Goals “Goals are broad statements directed at accomplishing the department’s mission.” (Compton and Granito, 2002)

Mission Statement “A mission statement outlines and institutionalizes an organization’s goals and values” (Compton and Granito, 2002). “It is the basic reason for the organization’s activities” (Bar and Eversole, 2003).

Objectives “Objectives are narrowly focused, defined steps directed at accomplishing a goal.” (Compton and Granito, 2002)

Strategic Management “Strategic management is the application of strategic thinking to the job of leading an organization.” (www.allianceonline.org)

<u>Strategic Planning</u>	Strategic planning is the process of developing a road map that guides an organization forward towards accomplishment of its goals and objectives while answering questions about its mission and values. (Rouson, 2005). It is a dynamic process that must be continuously evaluated and exists as a living document when completed. (Touchstone, 2006)
<u>Strategic Thinking</u>	Strategic thinking is critical thinking where a focus is placed on a purpose or end, understanding the environment, and creativity when developing effective responses to issues. (www.allianceonline.org)
<u>Stakeholder</u>	A stakeholder is an individual or group that has a vested interest in the activities of the organization. (Touchstone, 2009)
<u>SWOT</u>	The SWOT analysis is a tool used to assess your environment, through assessment of organizational (S) strengths, (W) weaknesses, (O) opportunities, and (T) threats. (Wallace, 2006)

Results

The results of this applied research project are gathered from the broad literature review on the subject of strategic planning. The results are focused to expound on the procedures and information gathered in the literature review, answering the three research questions.

Question #1:

What is strategic planning?

Strategic planning is “the organization’s road map for the future” (Compton and Granito, 2002). It involves a perspective of anticipation of the future environment of the organization, however the decisions are made in the present (www.allianceonline.org). Strategic planning is a process that is value driven with results that are clear and understandable by all members of the

organization (Siarnicki, 2002). Rouson (2005) states strategic plans include “big picture thinking about the social and organizational future, and decisions about how to realize an organization’s mission with specific goals, objectives, strategies, and resources – and involve stakeholders on the process.” Strategic planning is not a tool reserved for traditional large businesses. It has application in formal and non-formal environments and both large and small organizations. The chances of organizational success are significantly increased through the use of planning (Fire, 1997). The plan directs progress towards goals and objectives to realize a shared vision and it is a dynamic and evolving process that must be reviewed and revised frequently. It is also a creative process where the idea arrived at today may alter the decision made yesterday (www.allianceonline.org). Strategic planning is also labeled as a management tool where it is used to help an organization perform better, stay focused, insure the members are working towards the same goal, and prepare for an ever-changing environment (www.idealists.org).

Strategic planning is not a substitute for good leadership and sound decision making (www.allianceonline.org). Bryson (1995) states that if strategic planning is used without regard, it can actually negate the thought and actions that are the purpose of the desired plan. Bryson continues to state that it is not the same as organizational strategy. Bryson states that Organizational strategy is a separate process. He states that “strategic planning is likely to result in a statement of organizational intentions, but what is realized in practice will be some combination of what is intended and what emerges along the way” (Bryson, 1995).

Question #2:

What strategic planning processes or models are most effective and why?

The research has identified various strategic planning models and forms for organizations to use or adapt for use. Wallace (2006) indicates the type of planning model used will be gauged

by the organization's existing culture and the planning is influenced by an organization's internal and external strategic environments. McNamara (2006) states there are five planning models used in business: basic, issue/goal based, alignment, scenario based, and organic planning. Of the five reviewed in the literature review of this project, the application of any of the five could be effective in the fire service depending on the needs and current developmental status of the organization. However, the selection and application of the planning model is driven by the planning needs of the organization. If an organization is small and has not participated in any formal strategic planning, the basic or traditional model will work well (McNamara, 2006). If the organization has already participated in the planning process and is re-evaluating their plan, a higher level of planning may be in order. Boyd (1997) notes the strategic plan must match the organization. If grandiose schemes are implemented, the plan may exceed the organization's capacity and lead to the implementation of unnecessary elements that have little effect on organizational improvement (Boyd 1997). Through the literature review, the basic model of strategic planning is reflected in the strategic plans implemented by fire service organizations. The researcher notes that due its wide usage, the basic or traditional model is appropriate for fire service organization use.

Question #3:

What is the most appropriate strategic planning model for the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department?

The Stony Hill Rural Fire Department has never embarked on a strategic planning process in its fifty year history. As the appropriate methodologies are unknown to the organization and its leaders, a simple yet effective method must be employed for implementation. As research

question #2 revealed, the status of the organization is a primary factor on the effectiveness of the planning. Also noted by Boyd (1997) is the plan must match the organization.

The researcher has identified that the basic strategic planning model is appropriate for implementation at the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department due to the lack of previous experience and exposure to strategic planning. The basic model includes the essential elements needed for initial development of a responsive plan.

Discussion

Fire departments need the capability to prepare their organizations for the future. Strategic planning enables these organizations to more effectively prepare for and manage the change. The Stony Hill Rural Fire Department needs to employ a formal plan in order to address current and emerging changes in its environment and organization. The use of a structured strategic planning process is crucial to success.

In a traditional sense, strategic planning imparts thoughts of preparing for the delivery of emergency operations, however strategic planning is actually focused on organizational development (Wallace, 2009). The plan should determine the organization's strengths and weaknesses and provide a pathway for the future (Phillips, 2006). Organizational leaders must possess a vision of where they want their organization to be in five, ten, fifteen, or even twenty years. Touchstone (2009) states "vision is a leadership function." The organization's leadership must constitute the senior planning team and the chief officers are crucial in the process (Fire, 1996).

All organizations have stakeholders that must be included into the strategic planning process. Stakeholders are defined as individuals that are invested in the success or failure of the organization's mission (www.allianceonline.org). Touchstone (2009) labels a stakeholder as

anyone who has an interest in the organization. Barr and Eversole (2003) state that planning should involve the cooperative participation of all entities interested in the development of their community fire protection. This inclusion involves, but is not limited to personnel, management, elected officials, organized labor representatives, community members, industry, and vendors (Touchstone, 2009). Organizational stakeholders also include all formal and informal leaders. These personnel are a key component in determining how the organization views itself and their involvement will contribute to the establishment of organizational direction (Siarnicki, 2002).

Following the identification of the organization's stakeholders, environmental scanning is necessary to determine the internal and external factors that affect the fire department (Fleming, 1996). The stakeholders will perform this essential survey through feedback representing their interpretation of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). This analysis serves as the foundation of strategic planning. It provides a proven and structured means to sort the information that will serve as the formation of goals and objectives in the strategic plan (Fleming, 1996). Fleming (2001) concludes that identified environmental elements can be either an opportunity or a threat depending on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. Using the SWOT analysis as a part of the planning process can make a difference in an organization accomplishing its mission (Fleming, 2001).

The mission statement and values of the organization are important elements of the strategic planning process. They are both key to maintaining a focus on the goals and objectives involved in the planning process (Compton and Granito, 2002). Ross (1995) indicates that organizational values directly affect the behaviors of the people in the organization, and thus the organizational culture. If a strategic plan is not aligned with the organizational culture and mission statement, it is destined to fail (Ross, 1995). Both the mission and vision statements of

the organization may require revision or updating following the SWOT analysis where new goals and objectives are identified (Siarnicki, 2002).

Goals and objectives will be developed following the SWOT analysis. These goals and objectives should follow the SMART format: S = specific, M = measurable, A = achievable, R = realistic, and T = time limited (Touchstone, 2009). Compton and Granito (2002) define goals as broad statements that aid an organization in fulfilling its mission and state they identify the pathway to carry out the programs identified in the SWOT analysis. Objectives are more specific and are detail focused to achieve an established goal (Compton and Granito, 2002). Objectives must be developed by contributions from the organization and its stakeholders, both internal and external. These objectives must pertain to a specific program and will contribute to the overall plan (Barr and Eversole, 2003). Fire (1997) states if KROs (key result objectives) are not met, the fulfillment of the plan will not occur.

Once goals and objectives are developed, an action or implementation plan is necessary for execution of the strategic plan. Ross (1995) states the action plan should address two issues. First, what are forecasted problems in implementing the plan? Second, what are contingencies or options if the new plan does not work? In addition, proper strategies are required and the application of goals that are directly related to the mission is significant to move the plan ahead (Fire, 1996). Implementation must also be considerate of budgetary limitations and be in concert with the community expectations (Barr and Eversole, 2003). After implementation, the plan must be evaluated and feedback allowed for adjustment of the plan as necessary. Touchstone (2009) indicates that there is a very important relationship between the strategic planning process, outcomes and measures, and system improvement. He states “the strategic plan drives your quality or process improvement efforts, which in turn should help your organization achieve

the goals and objectives in its strategic plan.” Compton and Granito (2002) describe the monitoring phase as a continuous process where as goals are met, the program should be reevaluated and reinforced by adding new goals that strengthen the process. The monitoring and evaluation is essential to insure that the organization is following the direction established in the initial planning process (McNamara, 2008).

Recommendations

The researcher concludes that strategic planning processes are an essential tool for fire service organizations to implement. Achilles (2002) states that if fire service managers are to meet the demands of the ever-changing environment, they must possess an understanding and awareness of planning processes. Organizational success may be measured from a reactive perspective or be determined by your ability to adapt proactively.

The research suggests that the Stony Hill Rural Fire Department embark on a formal strategic planning process to prepare the corporation for the future. As the department does not have a formal method to prepare for change, an established process for planning would enable the organization to be more adaptive. The research identified what strategic plans are, exposed different models and styles of strategic plans, and revealed a type of planning model for the department to evaluate.

The research also revealed the importance of an all-inclusive approach to planning. A critical component for successful strategic planning is to involve all organizational stakeholders. This necessity is extremely valuable for a non-profit combination fire department due to its diversity of membership. Enlistment of both internal and external stakeholders is required for a quality plan to be produced. Inclusion of the board of directors, volunteer staff, paid staff, junior

members, and auxiliary personnel is critical. An additional survey of the community's perception is also required to measure the external environment.

Readers of this research should understand that there are multiple approaches to strategic planning and that the planning model or process selected must match the organization. Although the methodologies are similar, the planning process for a large municipal department may not fit the needs of a smaller non-profit combination fire department. Although this research will introduce the reader to the general aspects of strategic planning, additional research is suggested to identify the specific benefits of smaller non-profit fire department strategic planning.

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