

Strategic Planning Process

To develop a planning process to update the 1990-1995 Strategic Plan, St. Louis County reviewed strategic planning processes from both the private and public sector. Combining the best practices from the private and public sector examples, a five-step planning process was developed.



Step 1: Setting the Direction

The first step in the strategic planning process was to establish an internal pre-planning committee to set the direction of the Strategic Plan update. The pre-planning committee was formed in March 1998 with representation from the County Council, County Executive's Office, and four key departments.

Step 1 Actions:

! Determine if St. Louis County is Ready to Update the Strategic Plan

To determine if the County environment was suitable to proceed with a Strategic Plan update, the pre-planning committee evaluated costs and benefits of strategic planning, discussed barriers to a successful strategic plan and ways to overcome them, and identified key stakeholders. The committee also focused on key issues facing County government,

internally and externally. Ultimately, the pre-planning committee agreed that the County should proceed with the Strategic Plan update.

! Design the Strategic Planning Process

The 1990 planning process was presented to the pre-planning committee, highlighting what worked well and what could be improved upon. Department of Planning staff also conducted research and reviewed strategic planning processes used by other communities and the private sector. Overall, there is not much variation, as most strategic planning processes contain the same basic steps: pre-planning, situation/environmental analysis, issue identification, implementation, and monitoring. Thus, the pre-planning committee designed a planning process around the basic steps, incorporating key elements developed throughout the Committee's discussions.



KEY ELEMENTS OF THE 2000-2004 STRATEGIC PLAN

- ' Balance of external and internal input
- ' Holistic, cross departmental approach
- ' Full support by all levels of government
- ' Strong element of public participation
- ' Focus on results and be outcome-oriented
- ' Strive for effectiveness rather than consensus
- ' Connect outcomes and strategies to Department budgets and work plans
- ' Create a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating implementation
- ' Clearly state departmental responsibility and time frame to complete strategies

! Obtain Commitment from the Key Leaders of County Government

The pre-planning committee continually expressed the importance of obtaining support from the County Executive's Office, County Council, and department directors. The committee believes that support from all levels of County government is essential to the success of the Strategic Plan, since it is ultimately these parties that will be implementing the Plan's general action recommendations and outcomes and strategies.



Step 2: Assessing the Environment

The second step in the strategic planning process was to conduct an assessment of St. Louis County's external and internal environments. Externally, it is imperative to address the needs and concerns of the customers of County Government and examine opportunities and threats. Internally, it is important to examine existing strengths and weaknesses and project future trends to determine the future roles of St. Louis County government. Integral to assessing the environment, is providing a number of networks for input from the general public and County elected officials and staff.



Networks for Strategic Plan Information and Input

- ' **Intranet**
Available to all County employees, the Intranet was a medium for employees to e-mail feedback and provide input.
- ' **Internet**
The St. Louis County web site posted information about the Strategic Planning and had a mechanism for users to e-mail comments directly to County government.
- ' **E-mail**
A special e-mail group was set up to receive strategic plan input.
- ' **Telephone**
A 24-hour Strategic Plan telephone hotline with voice mail recorded citizen comments and provided the dates, times, and locations of the Community Forums.
- ' **Flyers and Postcards**
A flyer announcing the strategic plan update and how to provide input was included in the personal property tax bills mailed to over 400,000 households. Approximately 10,000 postcards inviting citizens to the community forums were mailed to subdivision trustees, libraries, school districts, churches, state and municipal officials, and many other groups.
- ' **Mail**
St. Louis County Department of Planning accepted and responded to written letters from citizens and other interested parties.
- ' **Media**
Newspapers, cable television, and radio stations were provided with information on the Strategic Plan.
- ' **Community Forums**
Nine community meetings were held at locations throughout St. Louis County to collect input from citizens.

Step 2 Actions:

! Conduct a Trends Analysis

A detailed analysis of regional and St. Louis County demographic, economic, and land use data was performed by the Department of Planning in order to identify the trends and impacts that will shape St. Louis County for the next five years.

! Produce a Video

St. Louis County Department of Planning staff produced a video, *St. Louis County: On the Brink of Change*, to correspond with the Strategic Plan update. The video highlights current County demographic conditions and discusses future trends that will impact the County. The video was shown to the public as background information to stimulate thought and discussion at the community forums.

! Conduct Focus Groups and a Telephone Survey

Focus groups and a telephone survey were administered by the Attitude Research Company (ARC) on behalf of the St. Louis County Department of Planning in December 1998 and February 2000. Prior to administering the telephone survey, four focus groups comprised of unincorporated and municipal County residents were held to refine survey questions and provide qualitative data. The telephone survey was then administered to 617 randomly selected households to provide quantitative data on the citizen satisfaction with County government as a service provider, awareness of the County's role in providing services, demand for additional services the County might provide, and major issues facing the County.

! Hold a Retreat for County Officials

Elected officials, department directors, and senior staff participated in a one-day retreat in February 1999. The purpose of the retreat was to bring together the influential people of county government to inform them of the strategic planning process, gain support for the effort, and obtain input on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) within St. Louis County government and St. Louis County as a place. The first half of the retreat included presentations of the trend analysis and telephone survey results, and the latter part focused on obtaining input. Retreat participants were

divided in four small discussion groups and facilitated by the Strategic Plan consultants, Development Strategies, Inc. (DSI) and FOCUS St. Louis. After compiling lists of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, retreat participants were asked to select the top issues facing the County.

! Organize a Steering Committee

A Steering Committee was formed in March 1999 to oversee the strategic planning process, critically review findings, and make recommendations for further action. The committee was comprised of twenty-two individuals representing St. Louis County government, municipalities, businesses, and regional organizations.

! Host Community Forums

Nine community forums were held throughout the County to gain diverse input from citizens on the critical issues facing St. Louis County in April 1999. Much like the retreat, Development Strategies, Inc. (DSI) and FOCUS St. Louis facilitated small group discussions on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of St. Louis County. Participants then voted on the most critical issues facing St. Louis County in the coming years.

! Write a SWOT Analysis Report

A summary report was drafted to combine the input from the SWOT analyses performed by County officials at the retreat and by citizens and interested parties at the community forums. The SWOT report formed a basis for identifying the most critical issues to be addressed in the Strategic Plan.



Step 3: Identifying Issues, Strategies, and Priorities

Data from the trends analysis, focus groups, random telephone survey, and SWOT analysis, coupled with the public input from the community forums, telephone hotline, e-mail, and mail revealed a range of issues. However, there were four issues that were continually named as being top priorities for St. Louis County to address over the next five years. The four strategic issues are:

- ! **County's Role in the Region**
- ! **Reinvestment in Older Communities**
- ! **Transportation**
- ! **Services to Unincorporated Areas**

Additionally, a number of overarching issues emerged, including:

- ! **Reviewing the organizational structure of County government to better address its strategic priorities**
- ! **Implementing broader means of communication**
- ! **Financing strategic priorities**
- ! **Addressing the needs of a diversifying population**

Step 3 Actions:

! Draft Issue Papers

Four research papers, one for each strategic issue, were prepared by Development Strategies, Inc. (DSI) and FOCUS St. Louis. The papers contain background information, in-depth analysis of the issue, and highlights of best practices from around the country to serve as examples of what could be done in St. Louis County. The issue papers provided an overall perspective of the critical issues to stimulate thought and discussion by the task forces.

! Form Task Forces

Expert task forces were formed to develop the specific outcomes and strategies to address the four critical issues. The four task forces, one focusing on each strategic issue, were composed of internal and external experts with considerable knowledge regarding the issue. Task force participants included County officials, municipal officials, regional and civic leaders, and private sector representatives. The task forces were facilitated by the strategic planning consultants, Development Strategies, INC. (DSI) and FOCUS St. Louis, and the St. Louis County Department of Planning staff.

! Meet with County Department Directors

The respective department directors responsible for implementing the outcomes and the strategies developed by the task forces were gathered together for group meetings. The purpose of the meetings was to obtain initial support and refine the outcomes

and strategies. The meetings were facilitated by Development Strategies, Inc. (DSI) and FOCUS St. Louis, and the St. Louis County Department of Planning staff.

! Conduct Public Opinion Polling

Focus groups and an opinion poll were conducted in December 1999 and January 2000 by Attitude Research Company (ARC) on behalf of the St. Louis County Department of Planning to test the recommendations of the Strategic Plan. The focus groups, made up of unincorporated and municipal County residents, helped refine opinion poll questions and served as qualitative data. The opinion poll was administered to 603 randomly selected households to ensure that the outcomes and strategies developed by the task forces were consistent with the ideas of the general public.

Specifically, the opinion poll asked for each resident's opinion on Strategic Plan recommendations that would require voter approval including bond issues, sales tax increases, and reestablishing the use tax. Topics that were tested include infrastructure, parks and bike trails, MetroLink, downtown improvements in the City of St. Louis, and revitalizing deteriorating neighborhoods of St. Louis County through a Community Comeback Trust.



Step 4: Developing and Implementing the Strategic Plan

Step 4 Actions:

! Write the Draft Plan

With the strategic issues identified, general action recommendations targeted, and outcomes and strategies established, the draft 2000-2004 Strategic Plan was written by the St. Louis County Department of Planning. The draft Strategic Plan presented a brief overview of St. Louis County demographic information and trend analysis, and reviewed the strategic planning process. The heart of the draft Strategic Plan focused on the four strategic issues, general action recommendations, and outcomes and strategies.

! Review the Draft Plan

The draft 2000-2004 Strategic Plan was issued for public review in October 1999. Copies of the draft Strategic Plan were distributed to participants who provided input into the Strategic Plan, including citizens, County departments, municipalities, steering committee members, and task force participants. Copies of the draft were also made available at local public libraries. Overall, the draft Strategic Plan was well-received, and no substantial changes to the content were suggested.

! Develop the Final Strategic Plan

The final 2000-2004 Strategic Plan will be produced in two formats. A citizen format will include a short summary of the strategic planning process, strategic issues, general action recommendations, and outcomes and strategies. The County government format will be a comprehensive work book designed for use by elected officials, department directors, and key staff. Both documents will be written by the St. Louis County Department of Planning.

! Adopt the Strategic Plan

The 2000-2004 Strategic Plan will be presented to the County Council for formal adoption in 2000.

! Implement the Strategic Plan

Implementing the general action recommendations and outcomes and strategies will be the primary responsibility of County departments. It is critical that departmental budgets and work plans are linked to the recommendations of the Strategic Plan. To do this, departments will be required to complete Action Plans outlining the measures they will take in each year to further the implementation of outcomes and strategies. The Action Plans will also detail who will be the responsible party and the target date for completion. Departmental Action Plans will be updated annually.



Step 5: Monitoring and Evaluating Performance

By having a systematic way for comparing actual performance to planned performance, the actions that proved effective and those that did not can be

determined. With that knowledge, St. Louis County government can reassess what to do differently in the future to better achieve outcomes and strategies in the Strategic Plan.

Step 5 Actions:

! Complete Progress Reports

County departments responsible for implementing the outcomes and strategies of the Strategic Plan will complete semi-annual progress reports. The progress reports will detail the actions taken by departments toward achieving a specific outcome and strategy of the Strategic Plan, including the responsible party, budget amount requested, and progress to date.

! Monitor Plan Implementation

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the 2000-2004 Strategic Plan will be an ongoing process requiring the time and commitment of the County Executive's Office, County Council, department directors, and key staff. Internally, the County Executive's Office will serve as the monitor for Strategic Plan implementation. The County Executive's Office will review the semi-annual progress reports completed by the County departments responsible for implementing the outcomes and strategies of the Strategic Plan in June and December for each year of the 2000-2004 Strategic Plan.

Externally, an independent committee will be charged with monitoring and providing feedback on Strategic Plan implementation. The committee will be made up of citizens and other County stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. It is expected that this committee will meet bi-annually, corresponding to the submittal of the semi-annual progress reports from County departments.

! Produce an Annual Report Card

At the end of each year of the 2000-2004 Strategic Plan, an annual report card will be produced and released to the general public. The annual report card will evaluate the year's activities related to the Strategic Plan, and assign letter grades based upon how well St. Louis County has furthered the achievement of the outcomes and strategies of the Strategic Plan.