



Association Strategy: What's Next

You've weathered the chaos of a pandemic. And, you're riding out the ups and downs of the markets. You are settling in to remote or hybrid working. What now?

The last few years have been stressful, with a great deal of disruption and crisis management for most associations. Yet over that time we have seen teams pull together, boards step up and step in, and everyone getting a taste of what it's like to adjust to change at the speed of light. After such a whirlwind, you may find yourself and your board feeling a bit lost. What's next now that the crisis is over (or at least mostly under control)?

With such a dramatic and far-reaching shift of our world in such a short time frame, it can be easy to question whether anything that came before is still valid. In the midst of crisis, we were focused on the here and now, adjusting to ever-changing circumstances one moment at a time. And, we've seen how quickly things can change, even when we least expect it. While we must continue to make in-the-moment adjustments, we must also once again look forward.

Look to the Future

How, you may ask, can we look forward when we don't really know what the future will hold? It's true that the future seems less clear knowing how dramatically things changed over the past few years and how they continue to change. But, if we are honest, we realize that the future was never really certain to begin with. We have been talking about a VUCA world (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) for quite some time now. Yet we must continue to plan for the future or we will stall or become adrift on a sea of change happening to us rather than navigating those seas proactively. To act proactively you must plan and to plan you must imagine a future you want to create.

*Now is the time to take a
deep breath and refocus. Not
retrench, refocus.
Refocus your efforts and
energy on the future, on your
strategic direction.*



Most organizations have a structured plan for moving toward a better future. Creating those plans required some sort of agreement about an imagined future that we wanted to create through our actions. Those strategic plans can continue to bring your organization together and direct individual actions.

Revisit the Current Plan

As you think about what is next for your association, as we move beyond the immediate and set priorities for the next few months or years, pull out your last strategic plan and have another look. You may be surprised at just how much those overarching strategies helped to unconsciously guide you through a period of change. Many are likely still relevant and they are likely to give you a renewed sense of purpose and direction.

As we have been working with clients to refine, or reset, their strategic plans in this environment, we are finding that their priorities have largely not changed. Their mission is the same. Their vision of the long term impact they will have on the world has not changed. Even their strategic goals are largely on target.

There may be some adjustments to the tactics on how to achieve those goals, or even a slight shift or narrower focus to what they want to accomplish. For example, instead of just thinking about online education, maybe they will shift to be more focused on specifically providing CEUs virtually. Or, maybe they will take advantage of the uptick in adoption of robust virtual communications to set up international networking events to increase member engagement rather than just online forums or listserves. When we set strategy today we do a bit more scenario planning to account for a variety of potential market shifts. But, as a mission-driven organization, the future your association is committed to achieving – your underlying strategy – is likely very similar to what it has always been.

Refocus on Mission

Revisiting your core strategies as found in your vision, mission, and strategic plan can be an important step in refocusing your staff, board and volunteers to help them move beyond crisis management. Doing so keeps everyone focused on the future they want to help create rather than the uncertainty of the moment.

This is also an opportune time to refocus your stakeholders on the greater purpose for which you are all coming together. Associations have a unique role to play in bringing communities closer together and building the positive future in which we all want to live and work. Stay focused on the future you want to create by continuing to align around your vision, mission, and strategic plan as we move forward through uncertainty. Your members and your team will thank you for your leadership.

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to take the next step toward accelerated success.