The Process
Jefferson County Government Strategic Plan

This article provides insights about Jefferson County government's extensive strategic plan process and results.

According to County Administrator Gary Petre, "the formulation of the process of developing the County Government Strategic Plan came at a very critical time in the management of county government. The working relationship between the county board and department heads and their staff was strained due to financial pressures facing the county, and increased tensions and mistrust that surfaced among the workforce and elected officials." In response, the Administration and Rules Committee requested that the county office of Cooperative Extension (a division of UW-Extension) help the county understand the role of strategic planning in governmental applications, and help establish the framework for a good process. Jefferson County then put together a timeline and structure for this process.

Definition: A strategic plan is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide an organization and what it does. A strategic plan focuses organizational dynamics, and typically identifies 2-4 strategic issues. It provides a strategy or action framework.

Needs: The county came to recognize that a good strategic planning process provides an important foundation for addressing complex challenges. This was reinforced by UW-Extension (UW-Ext.) education and a Wisconsin Counties Association conference on strategic planning attended by a delegation from Jefferson County.
Jefferson County Government

**Mission Statement**

To fulfill County government’s responsibilities to its citizens and advance the quality of life in Jefferson County.

**Motto**

Jefferson County: Responsible government advancing quality of life.

**Process & Involvement:** This strategic planning process is based on the approach developed by the UW-Ext. Strategic Planning Team. The adapted process includes seven steps.

The county board approved a 15 member steering committee with seven county board supervisors, eight department heads, the county administrator, and the UW-Extension community development educator as facilitator. All major functions were represented. Other county supervisors and department heads were invited to attend planning workshops. A Coordinating Work Group met regularly for routine logistical considerations.

Public involvement included a citizen survey conducted by the Survey Research Center at UW-River Falls. A scientific sample of the county population assessed satisfaction with and importance of county functions, confirmed issues, tested preliminary vision ideas and provided guidance on priorities (450 completed surveys and a 41% response rate).

**Timing and Costs:** The project took 15 months and included 14 steering committee workshops.

The cost for the Survey Research Center work was $6,000.

**RESULTS**

**Section 1: Planning the process & stakeholder analysis**

The planning process was carefully designed. The stakeholder analysis identified several internal and external stakeholder groups that warranted extra attention during the planning.

**Section 2: Formal & informal mandates**

The steering committee identified and characterized important “formal” mandates or requirements. The steering committee also uncovered “informal” mandates, which are county activities that have become expected from citizens. Perspectives on the implications of mandates for future county direction were shared.

**Section 3: Core values & the mission**

Three broad value categories and seven core values were identified. Values indicate how county government would like to be viewed by others. “Service values” included respect,

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plan and discuss the plan and how their role fit into the larger picture. Since then, each new employee completes the same form which I personally discuss with them during their orientation training program.

Horizontal alignment focuses on the bigger picture and how each department and team contributes to ultimately achieving the larger vision. To get departments to think beyond their 'silo', when a director submits a program budget for consideration, he/she must identify how that budget supports at least one of the six Key Strategies. In addition, each department director has been asked to complete a budget matrix that identifies

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transparency, honesty and responsibility. Trust and accountability were stewardship values, and the skills values included competence, professionalism and efficiency and innovation.

Prior to plan development, the county had not articulated its philosophy around core values. Similarly the county had no mission statement. The mission clarifies the fundamental purpose of county government as an organization.

The county government’s primary purpose or mission is: “To fulfill county government’s responsibilities to its citizens and advance the quality of life in Jefferson County.” For easy communication of this mission, the steering committee also developed a motto: “Jefferson County: Responsible government advancing quality of life.” After plan approval, the motto was immediately used on communication mechanisms.

Section 4: Assessments
This step enabled the examination of county government’s past and current strengths and weaknesses, as well as anticipation of future challenges. Opportunities and hopes for the future were also identified. This step supplied the overall systems view of county government and brought out clues for identifying strategic issues. The foundation for county vision statements was established.

Section 5: Strategic issues & vision of success
The steering committee selected three strategic issues (most important issues) after careful issue framing.

- **Strategic Issue 1**
  Education & Communication: How can county government educate both the public and its own internal stakeholders about its mission and services?

- **Strategic Issue 2**
  Environmental/Economic/Cultural: How do we protect and preserve our environmental and cultural heritage, and become energy secure while encouraging and supporting sustainable economic activity?

- **Strategic Issue 3**
essential and non-essential services, and how each service supports our city's strategic goals. Doing so allows us to prioritize what is most critical to achieving the overall organization's success (not just success for a specific department). Today, we have more internal collaboration than we have ever had before because of these efforts.

Whether it is achieving optimal organizational performance or winning the Lombardi trophy, strategic planning is critical to an organization's success. Even—and most importantly—when the pressure is on, you need a 'game plan' to give you the long-term vision of where you want to be. If you just play day-by-day, you may achieve short-term goals, but you will never reach the epitome of "Super Bowl" success.

Public Services/Quality: How do we decide what services we should provide and at what level while responding to quality, quantity and return on investment?

A detailed "Vision of Success" for the county and its government was developed.

Section 6: Formulating strategies & an action agenda
This section identified major actions for each of the strategic issues. Several of the priority strategies are underway.

Section 7: Plan Management
This section articulated protocol for plan approval, implementation and use. County policy committees and departments will be key implementing bodies, and the Administration and Rules Committee was charged with plan oversight.

Implementation & Accomplishments
The county is making progress on strategy implementation. It has committed staff resources for a new electronic newsletter from the office of Jefferson County Board Chair John Molinaro. The new motto is prominent on official county documents, and social media sites have been established. A follow-up online survey of the entire county workforce, local officials, and the county board was conducted by the Survey Research Center to help improve county governing practices and relationships. The board chair and administrator will use the strategic plan during upcoming budget deliberations. Discussions on core values, mission, issues and vision are planned as part of new county board member orientation.

All strategic plan documents, including an Executive Summary and PowerPoint presentation, are available online at the UW-Ext. website:


According to Gary Petre, "This process was very timely and rewarding. We now have a roadmap to follow for making county government better understood and focusing our efforts and resources in areas important to county residents."
UW-Extension has invested significant resources over the past 15 years in building the capacity of its county faculty in the area of strategic planning. Since that date, over 400 county faculty and staff have taken advantage of in-service training designed to improve their knowledge, understanding and application of strategic planning skills and tools. As a result, county UW-Extension faculty have engaged hundreds of groups statewide in developing and updating strategic plans. These groups include governmental units (full county government operations, county policy committees, county departments and functions, non-profit organizations); community groups; chambers of commerce; and economic development/business organizations.

Given the specialized skills and experience needed to lead a strategic plan process, UW-Extension facilitators are not evenly distributed across the state. In a few counties, faculty are actively involved in strategic planning. In others, faculty have not received the training. To determine the level of strategic planning support available in your area, please contact your county UW-Extension office. A complete listing of county offices and contacts is available at http://yourcountyextensionoffice.org.