**What is Strategic Planning?**

Strategic planning is an organizational management activity that is used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, ensure that employees and other stakeholders are working toward common goals, establish agreement around intended outcomes/results, and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. It is a disciplined effort that produces fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, who it serves, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. Effective strategic planning articulates not only where an organization is going and the actions needed to make progress, but also how it will know if it is successful.

**What is a Strategic Plan?**

A strategic plan is a document used to communicate with the organization the organizations goals, the actions needed to achieve those goals and all of the other critical elements developed during the planning exercise.

**What is Strategic Management?**

Strategic management is the comprehensive collection of ongoing activities and processes that organizations use to systematically coordinate and align resources and actions with mission, vision and strategy throughout an organization. Strategic management activities transform the static plan into a system that provides strategic performance feedback to decision making and enables the plan to evolve and grow as requirements and other circumstances change.

**What Are the Steps in Strategic Planning & Management?**

There are many different frameworks and methodologies for strategic planning and management. While there is no absolute rules regarding the right framework, most follow a similar pattern and have common attributes. Many frameworks cycle through some variation on some very basic phases: 1) analysis or assessment, where an understanding of the current internal and external environments is developed, 2) strategy formulation, where high level strategy is developed and a basic organization level strategic plan is documented 3) strategy execution, where the high level plan is translated into more operational planning and action items, and 4) evaluation or sustainment / management phase, where ongoing refinement and evaluation of performance, culture, communications, data reporting, and other strategic management issues occurs.

**What Are the Attributes of a Good Planning Framework?**

The Association for Strategic Planning (ASP), a U.S.-based, non-profit professional association dedicated to advancing thought and practice in strategy development and deployment, has developed a *Lead-Think-Plan-Act* rubric and accompanying Body of Knowledge to capture and disseminate best practice in the field of strategic planning and management. ASP has also developed criteria for assessing strategic planning and management frameworks against the Body of Knowledge.

These criteria are used for three primary purposes:

* Ensure that the ASP Body of Knowledge is continuously updated to include frameworks that meet these criteria.
* Maintain a list of qualifying commercial and academic frameworks recommended for study and training, to prepare participants to sit for the three ASP certification examinations.
* Provide a resource and “check list” for practitioners as they refine and improve their organization’s systems and for consultants as they improve their product and service offerings.

The criteria developed by the ASP are:

1. Uses a Systems Approach that starts with the end in mind.
2. Incorporate Change Management and Leadership Development to effectively transform an organization to high performance.
3. Provide Actionable Performance Information to better inform decision making.
4. Incorporate Assessment-Based Inputs of the external and internal environment, and an understanding of customers and stakeholder needs and expectations.
5. Include Strategic Initiatives to focus attention on the most important performance improvement projects.
6. Offer a Supporting Toolkit, including terminology, concepts, steps, tools, and techniques that are flexible and scalable.
7. Align Strategy and Culture, with a focus on results and the drivers of results.
8. Integrate Existing Organization Systems and Align the Organization Around Strategy.
9. Be Simple to Administer, Clear to Understand and Direct, and Deliver Practical Benefits Over the Long-Term.
10. Incorporate Learning and Feedback, to Promote Continuous Long-term Improvement.