



The 5 Keys to Creating Strategic Plans that Work

By Ryan Nichols, North Carolina Market Development Executive for ClearGov

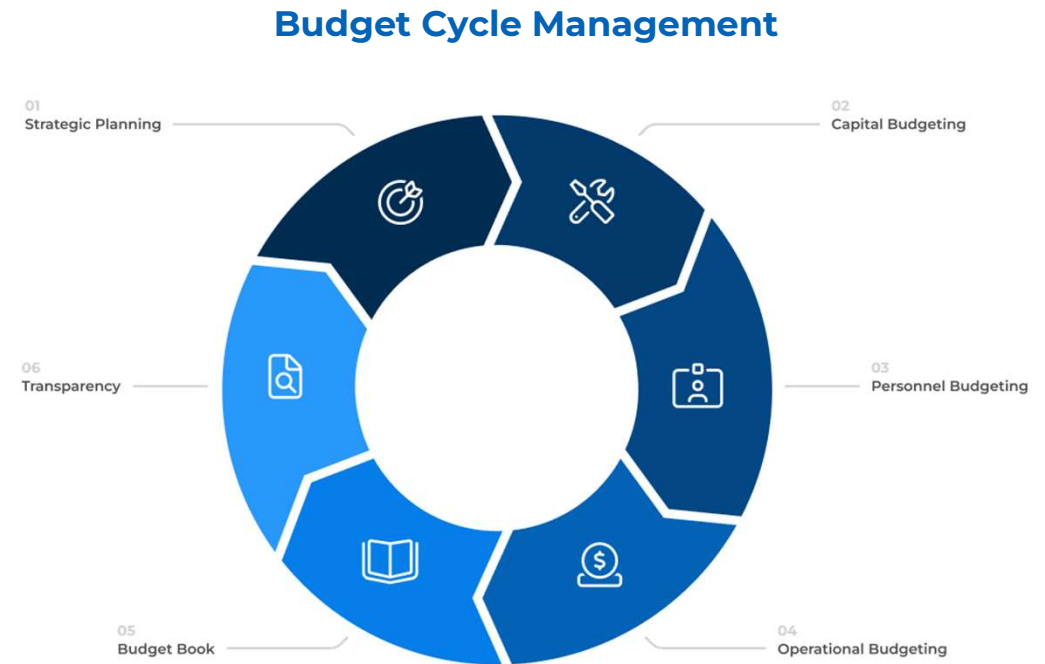
Foreword

This presentation leverages concepts from the GFOA's "Rethinking Strategic Planning" article, as well as leading strategic planning consultants and ClearGov clients.



Why Strategic Planning?

- 1. Strategic Planning should be the foundation of any budget.** We are uniquely positioned to connect strategic planning to the budget.
- 2. Most agencies do a good job creating their plan, but many do a poor job executing their plan.** We see an opportunity to not only reinvent how plans are created and communicated, but also how agencies manage the execution of their plan.



Why are Strategic Plans So Important?

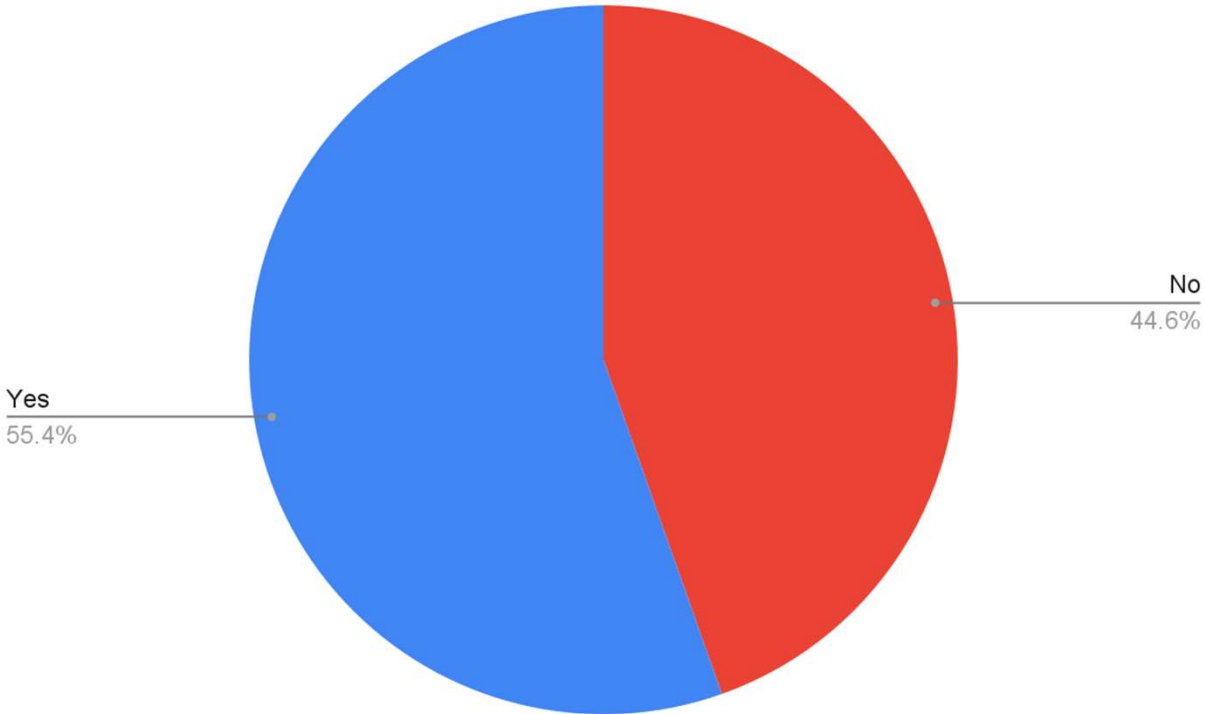
- Clearly communicate to residents your vision for their community and how their tax dollars are providing value.
- Aligns internal stakeholders to support your vision and get things done.
- Move beyond “reactive tactical mode” to “proactive strategic mode.”
- Help build community trust in an environment where trust is eroding.



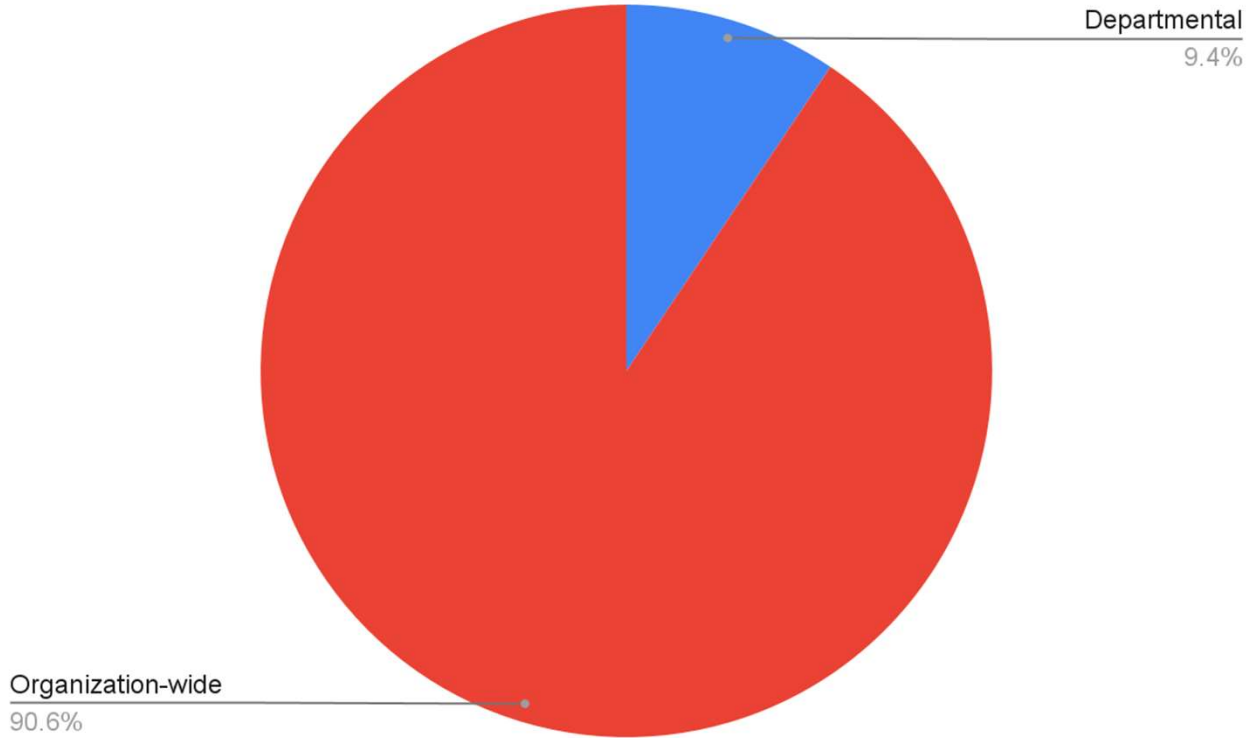
Poll #1

**Do you have a recent,
organization-wide Strategic Plan?**

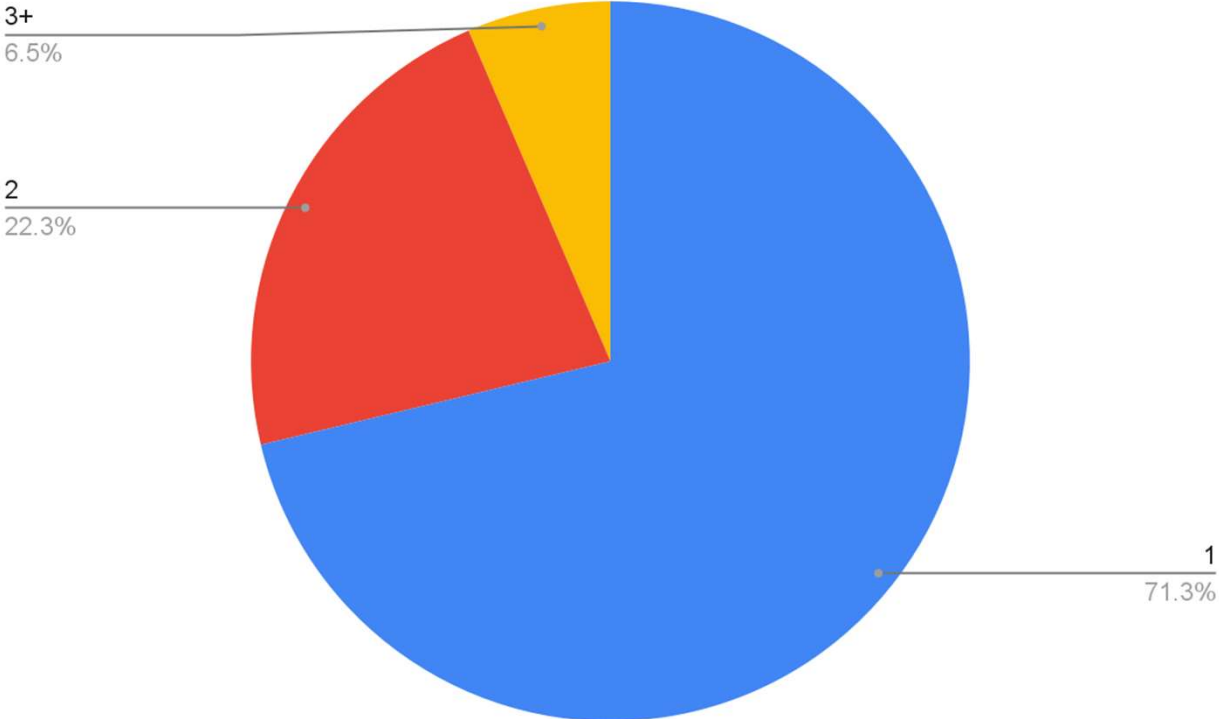
Did we find a plan?



What kind of plan did we find?



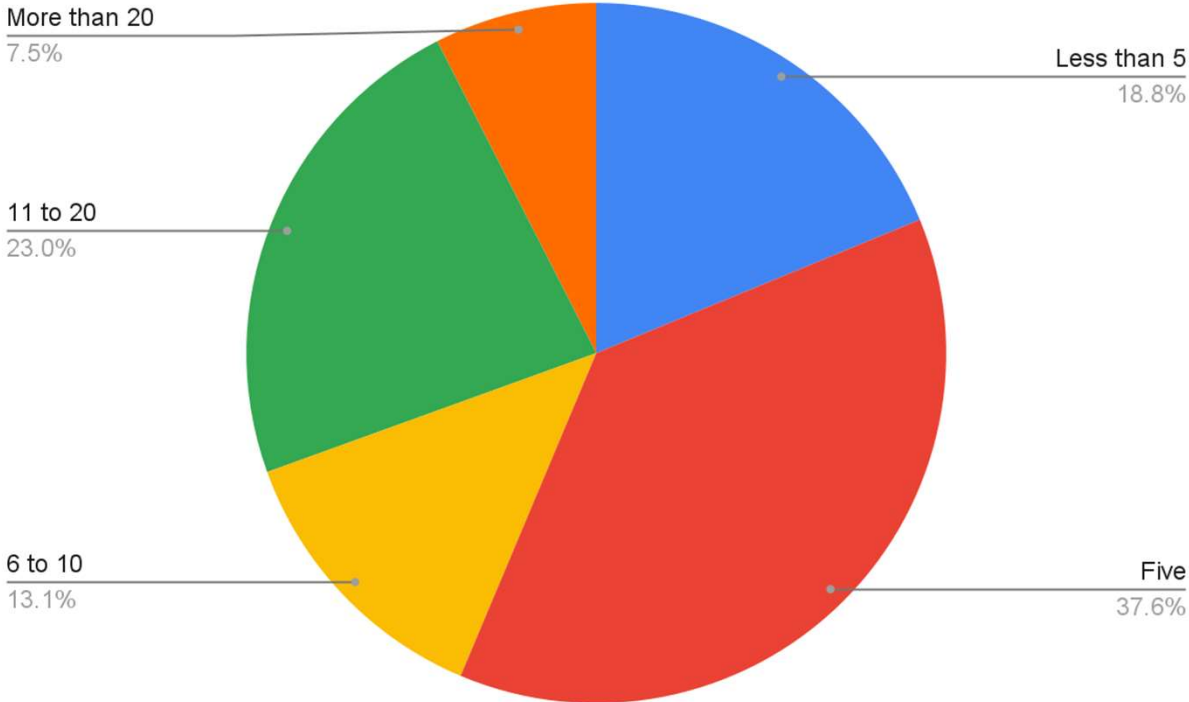
How many plans were findable per organization?



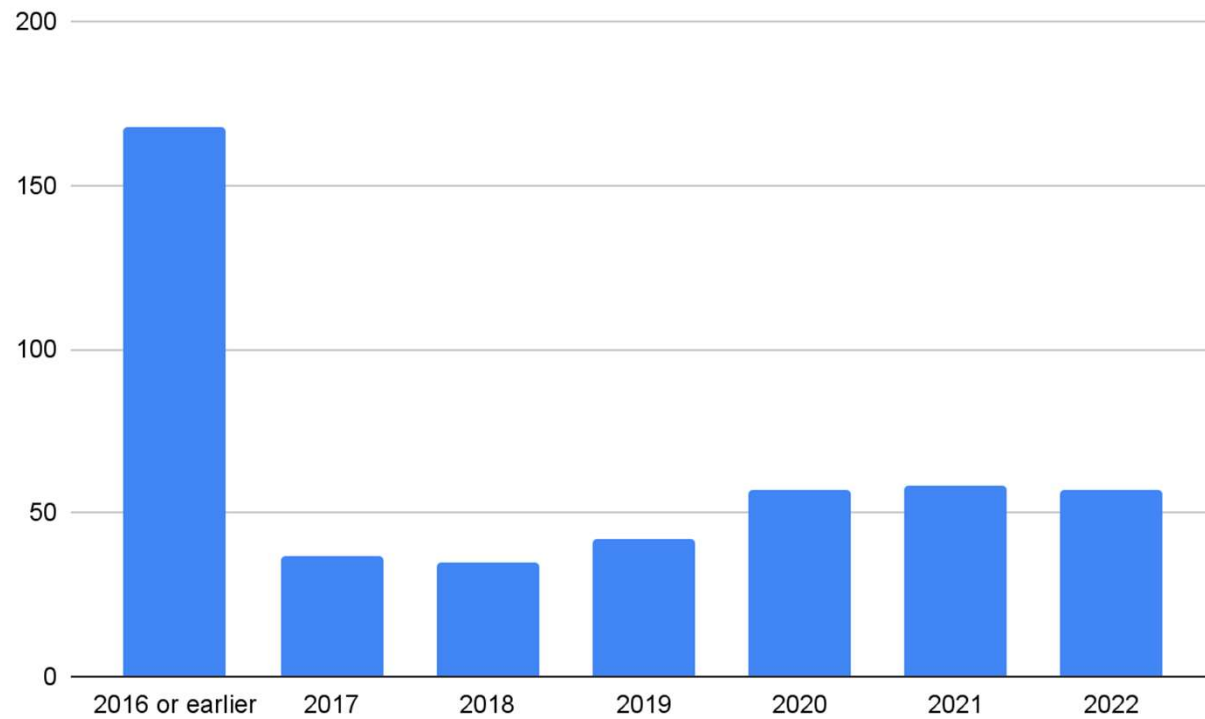
Did we find an organization-wide plan?



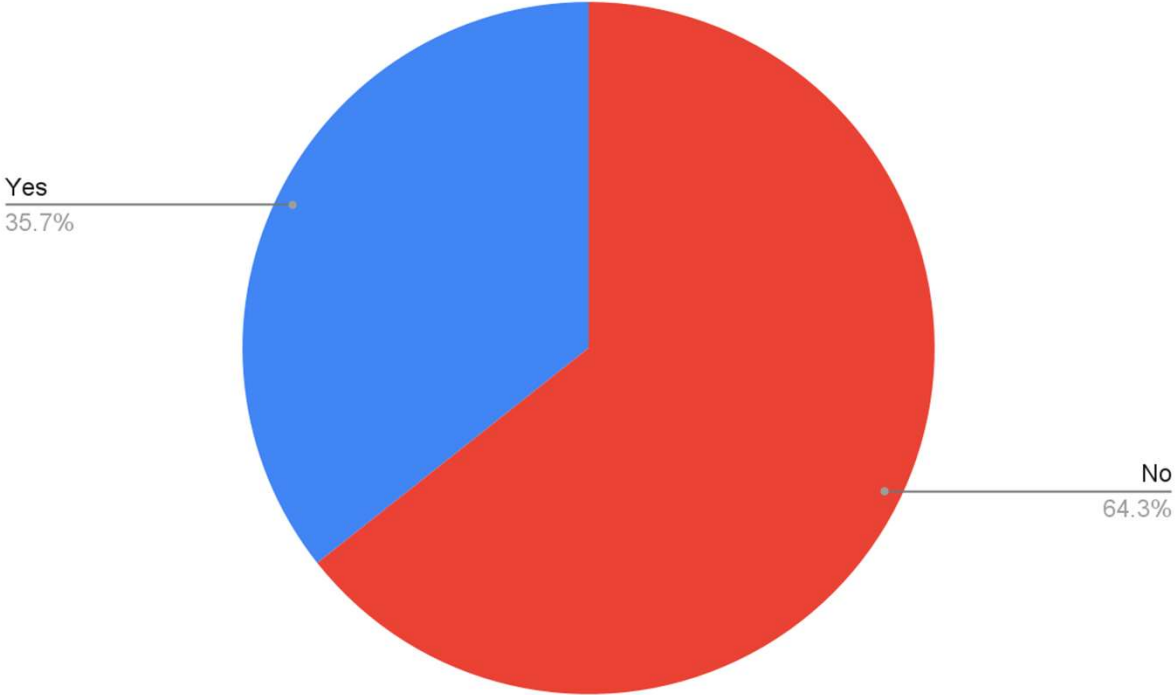
How many years do these plans cover?



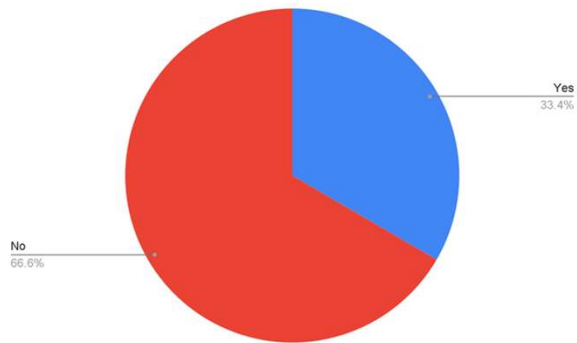
What year was the plan we found created in?



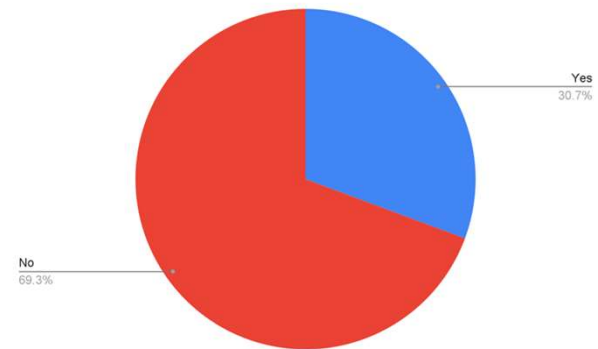
Are there recent, organization-wide plans?



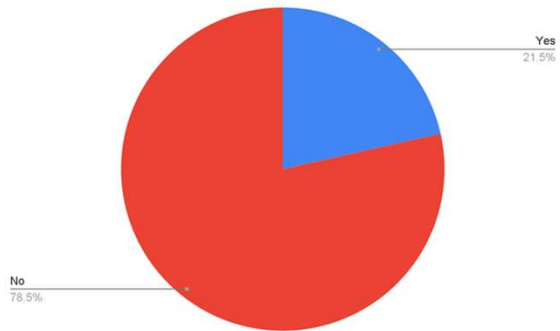
Municipalities



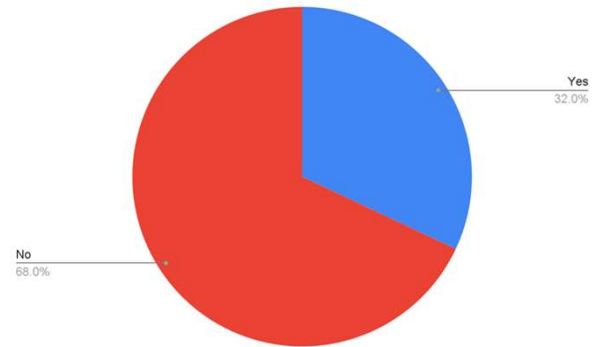
Special districts



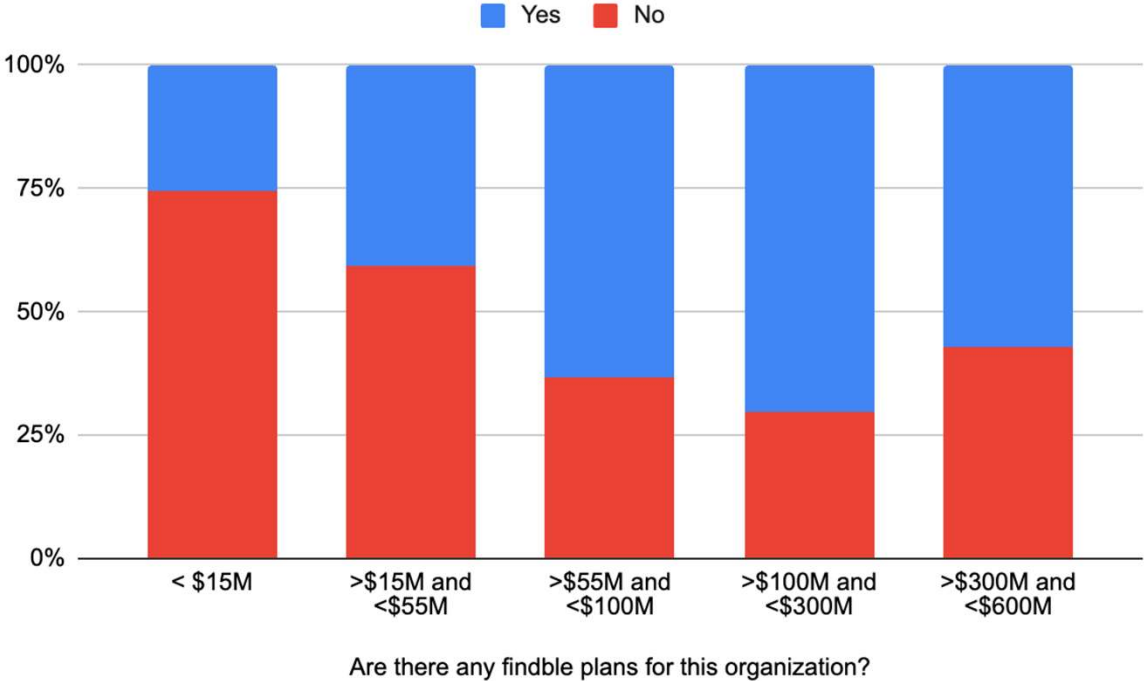
Counties



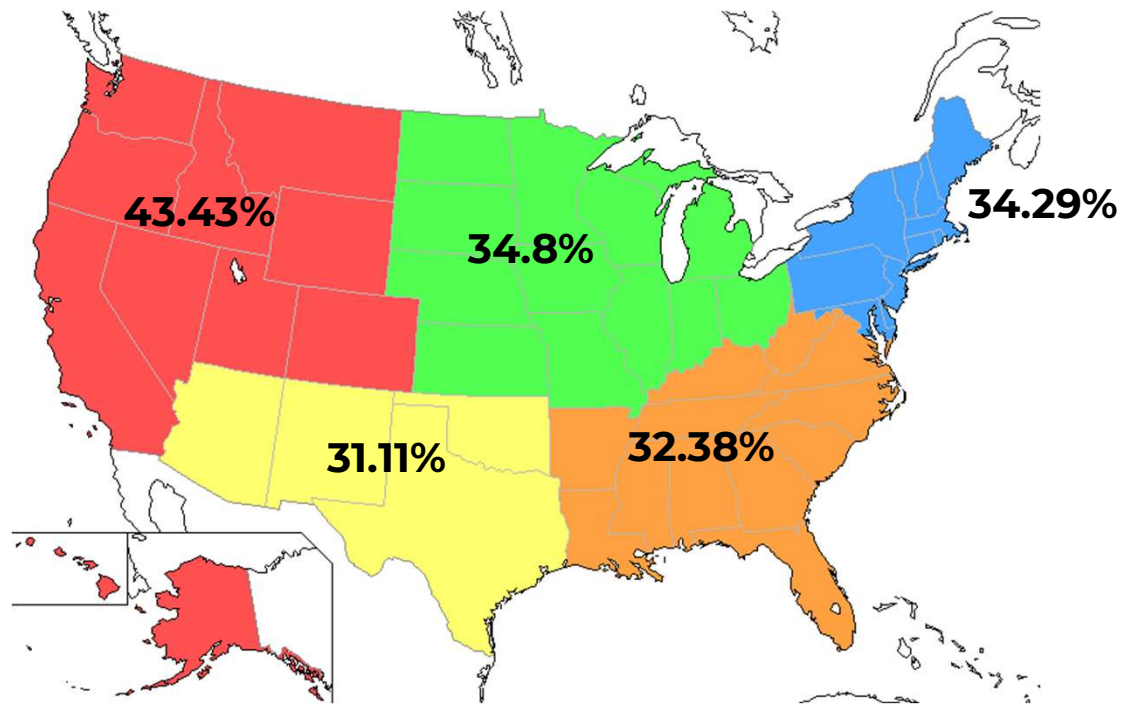
School districts



Recent, organization-wide plans by budget size



Recent, organization-wide plans by region



Poll #2

If you do not have a Strategic Plan, why not?

- A) There is not enough internal support.
- B) We don't have the budget for a consultant to help build the plan.
- C) We don't know where to start.
- D) We want to build a plan, but we've just been dragging our feet for no good reason!

The Traditional Approach to Strategic Planning



- Follow prescribed steps (e.g. develop a vision statement, SWOT analysis, etc.)
- Establish goals at the executive level
- State the plan, but don't update with progress metrics ("Checking the box")
- Progress is revisited (maybe) once a year with department heads and budget team
- Communicate as a dense printed book and/or PDF

The Five Keys to Modern Strategic Plans



1. Build Consensus through Collaboration
2. Keep It Simple & Focused
3. Stay Flexible & Adapt
4. Bring the Plan to Life
5. “Connect the Dots” to the Budget

KEY #1

Build Consensus through Collaboration

- **Phase 1: Gather open-ended input on most important issues**
 - Get the community involved in setting the vision - what's important for your customers?
 - If more people are involved, the more vested they will be in supporting the desired outcomes.
 - Make sure input is inclusive of different stakeholder perspectives, ages, races, income-levels, etc..
 - Open-ended input to define focus areas.
 - Hold public meetings or host open office hours.
- **Phase 2: Analyze open-ended input to find common themes**
 - Use tools such as ZenCity to identify common themes on social media.
- **Phase 3: Survey to prioritize themes**
 - Leverage modern survey tools, such as Survey Monkey, Facebook or Polco.



KEY #1

Build Consensus through Collaboration

- **Phase 4: Develop goals and measurable action items for each goal**
- **Phase 5: Implement action plan and track/communicate progress**
 - Communicate the planning process before & after
 - Gather feedback AFTER the plan is launched too!
 - Communicate that the plan will be refined over time!



KEY #2

Keep It Simple & Focused

- **Divide the plan into 3 levels; anything more is hard to digest, anything less is too vague.**
 - Focus Areas - What themes are most important?
 - Goals - What are the major goals within these themes?
 - Action Items - How will the team achieve the goals?
- **Focus Areas should not be functional areas, but rather overarching strategic goals that reach across and unite departments.**
 - “Public Works” vs. “Create a Welcoming Downtown”
- **Action Items should be measurable and “completeable”**
 - State whether Action Items are one time or recurring; if recurring, ensure metrics are updated regularly.
 - State who is responsible for Action Items (Department and Owner Name)
 - Not all action items have a scientific way to measure...and that's OK!
- **Communicate the plan in a way that everyone can quickly understand and access**
 - Top level “Key Performance Areas” should be broad, so readers can quickly find what interests them the most
 - Keeps the audience in mind; don't use acronym soup if most residents won't know what the acronyms stand for
 - Mobile is critical for today's “consumers”

KEY #2

Keep It Simple & Focused

- **Don't try to cover too much; not every department needs to be part of the plan; don't choke trying to eat the hamburger whole**
- **Introduce constraints - A local government only has so much capacity; can't tackle everything**
 - Is their political support for the goal? Will it gain funding?
 - Is their operation capacity to achieve the goal?
 - Will the goal provide positive public value for the cost?
- ***The more focused an issue is the easier it is to connect to a budget request.***
- **Problem definition is just as important as problem solving. Use the “Five Why’s” to get to the root of a problem.**
 - *What's driving crime rates?*
 - Is the problem too many guns on the street?
 - Or is the problem that education system is failing?
 - More specifically do graduation rates correlate with crime rates?
 - Even deeper, do reading at grade level rates correlate with graduation rates?

KEY #3

Stay Flexible & Adapt

“Agile Strategic Planning”

- Much of the private sector, especially technology, has moved to “Agile Methodologies.”
- Plan ahead, but heed the “Cone of Uncertainty”
 - We can predict the near future (next 3 months) with good accuracy, but as we get further out (3 to 6+ months) it becomes more difficult to predict when features will be released as we adjust to changing priorities.
- Update the long term vision infrequently, but we re-prioritize goals often.
 - Plans must be able to adapt over time and adjust to the unforeseen (e.g. COVID-19).



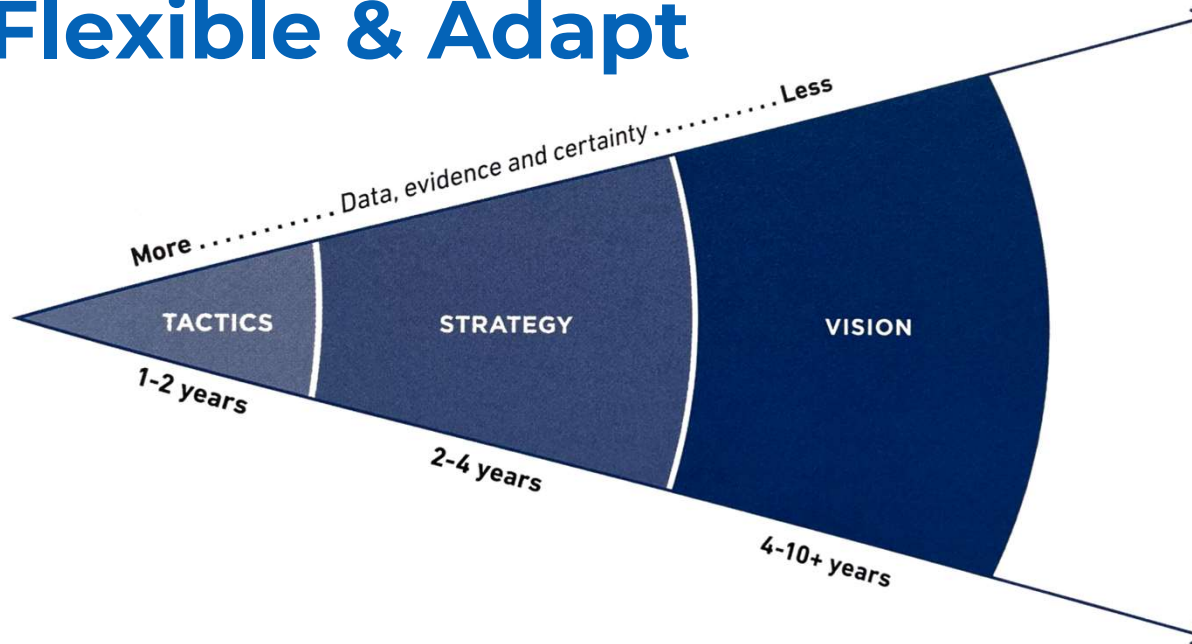
A black and white photograph capturing a moment of intense action in a boxing ring. Mike Tyson, on the right, is shown in profile, his right arm extended forward as he punches the face of another boxer on the left. The boxer being punched has a pained expression, with his mouth open and eyes closed. The background is dark, with several bright, out-of-focus lights hanging from the ceiling, creating a dramatic atmosphere. The quote "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face." is overlaid in white, italicized text across the center of the image.

"Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face."

Mike Tyson

KEY #3

Stay Flexible & Adapt



Time Cone

by Amy Webb, Futurist

Tactics are the actions you take to make progress against your strategic goals in the next 1-2 years. Tactics are often directly connected to the budget and available resources.

Strategy defines the direction and priorities for how the organization will achieve its vision. What are your goals for the next 2-4 years that will get you closer to your vision?

Vision should be aspirational for the community; broad enough to be adaptable, but not so broad as to be meaningless. Where do you want to be in 4-10 years?

KEY #3

Stay Flexible & Adapt

Develop a Rolling Planning Process

- **Don't spend too much time on specifics of long term action items as this will most likely change over time.**
 - Conditions change (Covid, new legislation, etc.); new opportunities arise (new grants made available, for example)
 - You may even find that tactics are not working (kids not enrolling in summer programs, for example)
- **Revisit plan annually**
 - Could be in alignment with election cycle (e.g. mayor or board) or budget cycle.
 - Vision and Focus Areas should not change often; Goals shift; Action Items are refreshed every year.
 - Define problems should be one-time exercise, though strategies may adjust depending on outcomes.
 - 5 Year plan with versions for each Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, etc.

“Imagine a highway - you can change lanes, but you have to stay within the guardrails.”

- William Chroba, CFO
Cleveland Metroparks

KEY #4

Your Plan Should Be “Alive”

- **Creating a plan is simply the first step! Don't just create the plan to “check the box.”**
- **Communicate status of the plan as it goes into action.**
 - Action items should be updated with statuses and progress levels on a regular basis that are appropriate for the task.
 - Best if they are measurable, “completable,” and/or achievable.
 - Software greatly enhances ability to keep the plan up to date.
- **Use data to quickly communicate:**
 - How much progress?
 - Is that good or bad?
 - How much are we spending on this?
 - Are we on track with this spending plan?

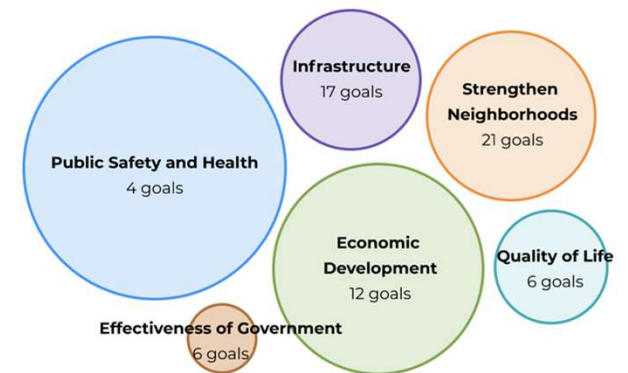


KEY #5

Connect the Dots to the Budget

- **Technology can now help you easily connect your strategic plan to your budget!**
 - Allocate budget line items to Focus Areas!
- **Plan-based budgets are easier to align to justifications**
 - “Postage Costs” vs. Mailing to support “Drive After School Program Attendance” goal.
- **Not all budget requests need to be tied to spending**
 - Much of government spending is simply operations and maintenance of public services.

Dollar Allocation By Key Performance Area



| Key Performance Area | Allocated |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Public Safety and Health | \$3,736,000 |
| Economic Development | \$3,504,000 |
| Strengthen Neighborhoods | \$1,812,000 |
| Infrastructure | \$1,620,000 |
| Quality of Life | \$492,000 |
| Effectiveness of Government | \$180,000 |

Final Thought...

**What's the most important
thing about a strategic plan?**

That is gets done!



Thank You!

Be sure to stop by our vendor table to learn more about ClearGov!