

# Strategic Planning

## For the Future of Your Association and Your Township

By: Nicole Ganim, OTA Director of Communications

**B**ack in April of this year, the OTA board and staff attended a retreat with one goal: to create a strategic plan for the future of the association. With the help of Ohio State University, the group set out to brainstorm what the future of the association could look like.

Creating the plan required the group to look at a variety of issues. We looked at the changing landscape of the world and how we communicate, the future of townships, and what a timeline might look like for these goals to be accomplished. But more than anything, the board discussed where they want to see the association, and by extension, Ohio townships, in the future. How do we ensure the preservation and promotion of the township form of government in a changing world? What more can we do to help grow townships and educate others on their existence, effectiveness, and benefits? How do we, as an association, set the organization up to be beneficial to all townships around the state?

After the retreat, multiple organizational sessions, and final board approval, we are thrilled to present what the OTA has planned for the future.

*For the first time in its nearly 100-year history, the OTA has developed a strategic plan to help guide the direction of the association for years to come.*



("Strategic Planning" continued on p. 20)

### What is a Strategic Plan?

Before we get into the OTA strategic plan, it's important to understand what is a strategic plan. A strategic plan is a document used by an organization to plan for the future, often for the next five to ten years. It includes large goals and the steps needed to achieve them. Given that these are often multi-year projects, it can consist of projected timelines and who will take on the process steps. It is often looked at like a map, guiding everyone in the organization in the right direction instead of a list of instructions.

The OTA strategic plan is meant to further our mission of protecting the township form of government and raising awareness of the township form of government. It looks at not only preserving the state association but also preserving and improving townships across the state. The OTA board and staff discussed many ideas and a few main themes emerged. These themes were the basis for the 2022 OTA Strategic Plan and how the group sees the organization in the future.

### The OTA's Strategic Plan

The OTA's strategic plan is broken down into three main priorities. They include Township Government Advocacy & Promotion, OTA Member Enrichment, and Organizational Sustainability. Under each of these sections, there are related goals with projected steps and timelines to achieve them.

#### Township Government Advocacy & Promotion

The OTA board and staff chose Township Government Advocacy and Promotion as the first priority in the plan, meaning it will work towards bringing awareness and support to the township form of government.

A unifying theme emerged to come to this conclusion. Many, including the general public and our state-wide elected officials, do not understand townships or know how they function. Without understanding this, it is easy to see annexation or elimination of townships in the future. Therefore, educating the public and our state legislators is vital to the preservation and progress of townships in the future.

The first goal under this topic is conduct in-district meetings between legislators and township officials. The OTA wants to help township officials build strong relationships with those in the Statehouse. The office will work with individual county township associations to invite their legislators to meetings in the next few years. By fostering these connections, townships can be better protected from legislation, such as annexation reform, in the future.

The second goal is create tools to educate about township government. The idea behind this goal is to help reach out to the general public, especially school-age children, about township government. To achieve this, the OTA plans to build out the OTA Townships 101 webpage, research outreach opportunities like hosting a township booth at the Ohio State Fair, and revamp our educational materials and videos to distribute them to townships and schools around the state.

With this first priority, our focus is on outward education and awareness, but the strategic plan has a large focus on the ultimate purpose of our association - our members.

#### OTA Member Enrichment

The second priority in the OTA Strategic Plan is all about you - the township officials and employees that keep the association going. Our

second priority is Member Enrichment.

The OTA looks to continue improving the skills and knowledge of township officials so they may continue to serve their townships best, which is the objective of this priority. The OTA hopes to implement two new goals in this priority over the next few years.

Goal one is to implement a member training program. Focused on newly elected officials or newly appointed employees, this program would help lay the groundwork of township government and the responsibilities of the elected officials. As townships are unique, the association looks forward to introducing a program for newly elected or appointed members to help them fully understand their roles. The program will be in-person and virtual, making it accessible to members all around the state.

The second goal in this priority is to establish a mentorship program. Like with the Winter Conference, networking is huge in understanding township officials' roles. The mentorship program would help facilitate networking by pairing newly elected officials with more established, long-serving officials from their areas. The program will utilize input from members throughout creation to ensure that it serves you, the member, best. Stay tuned for more information as this program progresses.

As you can see from our second priority, helping our members become better public servants is high on our priority list, but the OTA must also remain strong so it can continue to serve current members' needs.



## Benefits of Strategic Planning<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Create One, Forward-Focused Vision

One significant benefit of strategic planning is that it creates a single, forward-focused vision that can align your company and its shareholders. By making everyone aware of your company's goals, how and why those goals were chosen, and what they can do to help reach them, you can create an increased sense of responsibility throughout your organization.

### 2. Draw Attention to Biases and Flaws in Reasoning

The decisions you make come with inherent bias. Taking part in the strategic planning process forces you to examine and explain why you're making each decision and back it up with data, projections, or case studies, thus combatting your cognitive biases. Combating biases in strategic decision-making requires effort and dedication from your entire team, and it can make your organization's strategy that much stronger.

### 3. Track Progress Based on Strategic Goals

Having a strategic plan in place can enable you to track progress toward goals. When each department and team understands your company's larger strategy, their progress can directly impact its success, creating a top-down approach to tracking key performance indicators (KPIs).

1. Why is Strategic Planning Important?. (Catherine Cote) October 6, 2022. <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/why-is-strategic-planning-important>

## Organizational Sustainability

The final priority in our strategic plan is Organizational Sustainability. The organization desires to remain strong to empower Ohio's townships to endure the toughest times. To achieve this goal, in the next few years, the OTA will look to ensure a stable financial foundation to maintain and enhance the services we provide to members, create a service corporation to increase association revenue, and utilize different media types to improve messaging to all members.

The OTA plans to continue diversifying sources of income for the association to evolve and expand operations. By increasing revenue through diverse income opportunities, the organization can ensure stability for years to come. This stability also speaks to our other goal of enhancing services. The OTA strives to find new ways to serve members all across the state and create other opportunities to get involved. As these new services are being researched by the board and staff, we always want to hear from the membership, as well. If you have any ideas that you would like to see us implement, feel free to contact our office anytime.

Our final goal under Organizational Sustainability is utilizing diverse communication methods to improve messaging to all members. Technology is always progressing, and the ways we communicated when the organization first started in 1928 looked much different than today. We are looking toward the future to keep current as things change. In serving members from all over the state, we must account for those members who still lack reliable internet but keep in touch with those who prefer newer methods. The important thing is that our message gets to everyone, and this goal is how we hope to address this in a changing media landscape.

In these three priorities, the OTA is planning for the future. We want our members to come along with us as we move forward. While these are not the only plans the association has in store for the coming years, we hope this inspires confidence in the OTA, the Board of Directors, and the staff. We will commit to working towards these goals to keep Ohio townships strong.

## Evolving and Adjusting

*"You know what they say about the best laid plans..."*

In using the strategic plan, it's vital to understand that even perfect plans

face hurdles and changes. We have timelines and ideal steps to achieve all the priorities, but as recent history has shown, no one knows what the future may hold. Your state association has many duties and responsibilities, and we are constantly re-evaluating what is most important to serve the membership best.

For the strategic plan to be successful, it does not mean every task is completed as its currently written. The strategic plan is a flexible document to map out where we will go and how we will get there. So it is vital that we revisit the plan often. As a document that is consistently discussed and evaluated, we expect that goals, timelines, and processes can be adjusted.

So don't be surprised if the strategic plan in 2024 looks different than it looks today. But it is important for members to know that when faced with challenges, we will keep pushing to stay the course and work towards our goals.

## Strategic Planning in Your Township

Creating a roadmap for future goals and achievements is not just for your state association. We encourage all townships to create one of their own! Putting together a strategic plan can increase the clarity and direction of your township's future and help everyone work together.

Where do you start? Like the OTA's process, it can seem intimidating to think of everything you want to accomplish. So, start by getting your township's leadership together and make a list of everything you would like to see achieved in the next five years. Do you want to fix a dangerous intersection? Hope to expand your police force? Your township may want to enhance and repair a public park. Write all these things down; nothing is too big or small.

Eventually, themes will likely emerge that show the direction you envision for your township's future. Categorize the list into three or four themes. List several goals under each theme. Talk through these goals and discuss the potential steps to achieve them. Once you have those steps, create realistic timelines where you can. Before you know it, your township will have a strategic plan to help guide you toward future goals.

Whether you aim to increase businesses in the township, better your roads, or collaborate on large projects

## Tips for Creating and Executing Your Strategic Plan

- **Be realistic:** Your goals should be equal parts aspirational and attainable.
- **Make sure the goals represent your township:** Be sure that every strategic priority can be tied back to the mission and vision of your township.
- **Hear all the opinions:** Making sure everyone's voice is heard in the process is a great way to create a well-rounded strategic plan that has
- **Use your goals to plan the future you want for your township:** Do you want to improve the atmosphere for business in your township? Promote and improve your park systems? Look at your township's strategic plan as a way to break down these goals into smaller chunks to ensure these things happen in the future.
- **Be flexible:** It is common to adjust your goals and timeline. This is a guide, not an instruction manual.
- **Track your progress:** Your strategic plan is only as effective as you make it. Ensure that you are consistently checking in with your priorities and steps, making changes where necessary.

with other townships, a strategic plan can help. It can add clarity and guidance to those in newer positions or help remind you of the township mission. As our 2022 theme, Charting Your Course, our strategic plan will chart the course of the Ohio Township Association's future. Start 2023 right by doing the same. ■