Manager's Guide to Developing a Neighbourhood House Strategy

This is a guide to accompany the NH Strategy template PowerPoint to help assist in the development or review of your Strategic Plan.

Community House Network Southern is available to support Houses with strategic planning, facilitation, governance considerations and operational planning.

> **Remember**: The goal is not to create a perfect strategy. The goal is to create a useful one that provides clear direction and supports

1. Preparing for Strategic Planning

A strategy is a roadmap for your Neighbourhood House. It identifies the most important priorities you want to achieve over the next three years and helps guide decision-making, resource allocation, partnerships and future planning.

A good strategy:

- Is clear and practical.
- Reflects community needs and aspirations.
- Supports decision-making.
- Aligns the Committee of Management, staff and volunteers.
- Can be easily reviewed and updated.

Who Should Be Involved?

Strategic planning works best when multiple perspectives are included.

Consider involving:

- Committee of Management members.
- Staff.
- Volunteers.
- Participants and community members.

- Key partners and stakeholders.

Not everyone needs to attend the same session. Feedback can be gathered through conversations, surveys, workshops or existing community consultation.

Before You Start

Gather any information that may help inform the discussion, such as:

- Previous strategic plans.
- Annual reports.
- Program participation data.
- Community feedback.
- Survey results.
- Funding priorities.
- Local demographic information.
- Staff and volunteer feedback.

The aim is not to collect large amounts of data, but to gain a broad understanding of your community and organisation.

Suggested Planning Process

Step 1: Reflect

Consider:

- What have we achieved?
- What are we most proud of?
- What challenges have we experienced?
- What have we learned?

Remember: Remember to celebrate your successes and achievements. Strategic planning isn't just about identifying what needs to change, it's also about recognising and retaining the things your House already does well.

Step 2: Understand Our Community

Discuss:

- Who is currently participating?
- Who may be missing?
- What needs are emerging?
- What opportunities exist?

Step 3: Confirm Purpose

Review:

- Vision
- Mission
- Values

These should remain relevant and accurately reflect your House.

Step 4: Set Priorities

Identify the 3-5 most important priorities for the next three years.

2: Developing Strategic Priorities

What Makes a Good Strategic Priority?

A strategic priority should:

- Be important to your community
- Align with your purpose
- Be achievable within three years
- Help guide future decisions
- Be broad enough to allow flexibility

Examples

Instead of: Run a gardening program	Consider: Increase opportunities for community participation and connection
Instead of: Upgrade the kitchen	Consider: Improve facilities to support community needs and future growth

The operational plan can then include the specific actions required to achieve these broader priorities in a year (i.e. upgrade the kitchen as an action).

Writing Success Statements

For each strategic priority, describe what success would look like in three years' time.

Ask:

- What will be different?
- What will we see, hear or experience?
- How will we know we've made progress?

Example

Priority:	**Success looks like**:
Strengthen community connection and belonging.	Community members report feeling welcomed, connected and able to participate in activities that meet their needs and interests.

Turning Strategy into Action

Once your strategy is endorsed by the Committee of Management, develop an annual operational plan.

The operational plan identifies:

- Actions to be completed.
- Who is responsible.

- Timeframes.
- Success measures.

While a strategy usually covers a three-year period, the operational plan should be reviewed and updated annually.

Remember: a strategy does not need to be lengthy or complicated to be effective. The most useful strategies are often the simplest.

Annual Review Questions

Each year, revisit your strategy and ask:

- What progress have we made?
- What outcomes have been achieved?
- What challenges have emerged?
- What have we learned?
- Are our priorities still relevant?
- What should be included in next year's operational plan?

Regular review helps ensure the strategy remains a living document rather than something that sits on a shelf.

3.Resources

NHVic: Governance | NHVic: sample guides, SWOT templates and further information on Mission and Vision.

Appendix 1: Neighborhood house strategic Planning Workshop template

Duration: 3.5-4 Hours

Participants: Committee of Management, Manager, staff, volunteers and invited stakeholders

Facilitator: Internal or external facilitator

Resources Required:

- Strategy template (link)
- Butcher's paper or whiteboard
- Sticky notes
- Markers
- Community and House data (if available)

Item	Description	Approx timing
1.	**Acknowledgement of Country**	
2.	**Welcome and Purpose:** • Set the scene and create a shared understanding of the day's purpose.	10 mins
3.	**Session 1: Reflection** • Invite participants to reflect on the previous strategy period. • Use the prompts in the template to assist conversation Output: key themes and lessons identified and agreed	45 mins
2.	**Session 2: Understanding Our Community** • Complete the community snapshot section Output: agreed understanding of community needs and opportunities	30 mins
	break	
4.	**Session 3: Reviewing our Purpose** • Review Vision, Mission and Values Output: Vision, Mission and Values confirmed or updated. Agreed understanding of how this guides our daily operations, decision-making and interactions with the community.	20 mins

5.	**Session 4: Strategic Priority Development**
	• Brainstorm future priorities.
	• Ask:
	  ○ Based on everything we've discussed, what matters most over the next three years?
	  ○ What would have the greatest impact for our community?
		60 mins

	○ What must we focus on to remain sustainable? Group ideas into themes and identify 3-5 strategic priorities. • For each priority discuss: ○ What do we want to achieve? ○ Why is it important? ○ What will success look like? Output: Draft strategic priorities and success statements	
	Session 5: Prioritisation and Agreement • Review priorities and ask: • Are these the right priorities? • Are we missing anything • Are they achievable? Output: Final agreed strategic priorities to take to CoG for sign off	20 mins
	Close • **Next steps clarified on timing and who will:** ○ draft, when Committee will review for endorsement and how will the operational plan be developed Output: clear responsibilities and timelines	10 mins

Appendix 2: Reflective Questions for Reviewing Strategic Plan (optional deeper dive)

Questions to consider for each community development model as an additional level of reflect and evaluation.

1. **Involving the Community and Encouraging Participation, Inclusion and Diversity**	2. **Identifying Community Needs and Aspirations**	3. **Determining Appropriate Programs, Activities and Services**	4. **Partnerships, Funding and Support**	5. **Delivering Quality Programs, Activities and Services**	6. **Effectiveness of Operations, Practice and Governance**
How effectively did we engage community members in our activities, planning and decision making? Who participated and who did not? What barriers to participation were identified? How well did our programs reflect and welcome the diversity of our community? How did we promote inclusion, accessibility and belonging? What steps were taken to support priority or underrepresented groups?	How did we gather information about community needs and aspirations? What emerging community issues or trends were identified? How effectively did we respond to changing community needs?	How well did our programs align with identified community needs? Which programs had the greatest impact? Did programs attract the intended participants? Were there unmet needs that require new approaches?	How effectively did we build and maintain partnerships? Which partnerships added the greatest value? Were partnerships aligned with our strategic objectives? What funding opportunities were secured? Are there opportunities for new collaborations?	Were programs delivered as planned? Was participant satisfaction achieved? How was quality monitored and improved? Did staff and volunteers have the skills and support required? Were programs safe, accessible and well managed?	Did the Committee/Board effectively fulfil its responsibilities? Were governance policies and compliance requirements met? Was strategic oversight maintained? Were resources used effectively? Was financial management sound? Were systems and processes fit for purpose? Did staff and volunteers feel supported? Was organisational culture aligned with community house values?