

STEP 5

WRITE THE OPERATING PLAN

OVERVIEW

The Operating Plan translates the strategic pillars into the specifics of timing, people, and dollars. Through defining concrete units of specific activity to reach particular milestones on a well-defined timeline, it will identify associated resource commitments and cash costs that determine what is feasible in programming and what is required from fund raising.

This section describes the requirements and structure of an operational plan and the criteria to ensure it's feasible and measurable against success metrics.

This is an iterative process starting from a simple outline that discretely links the 3-5 strategic pillars to specific programs and activities and quantitates the reality of what's doable with existing capacity, capability, and funding. Through this calibration process a realistic costed and timed operational plan will emerge.

Absent a robust operational plan, the strategies may flounder due to lack of accountability, resources, or tactical management to achieve milestones.

Three Key Success Factors

1

Granular timed and costed activities

Each pillar in the the operating plan has singular accountability - however the programmatic delivery requires collective responsibility across the organization's key functional leaders. In the operating plan, you need to put names/initials against each program.

Each of the implicated contributing activities (for instance fundraising dollars each quarter, grant making, data infrastructure, marketing, and communications) must be assessed for resource allocation, cash costs, timing, and reporting metrics.

One additional reason why the costing is important is that the source (industry, philanthropy, venture, etc.) forces consideration of innovative models for sustainability and mechanisms to secure seed funding before initiatives begin.

This is a template from the downloadable MMRF case example used to specify the tactical operating plan implementation and identify gaps in the organization that must be filled to successfully deliver each pillar in the strategic plan.

Three Key Success Factors continued

The key to the operating plan is that it addresses timing, cost, and people. This assessment helps understand if you have to stagger initiatives or go and raise more money.

What are the specific activities that must be accomplished?

Who is assigned to each work-stream?

What are the milestones and timing?

Where are organizational capacity or capability gaps?

What's the implication for partnering or hiring?

2

Explicit governance

The board should hold the organization accountable for the tactical delivery of the plan and the sufficiency of fundraising to match the budget. Pillar owners must circulate periodic updates (e.g., quarterly) on progress and should bring decisions required from the leadership team based on reported progress metrics to course correct and adapt the strategy as necessary.

Three Key Success Factors continued

3

Adoption by the culture - and adaption to change

The strategic and operational plans are living documents that should infuse direction, purpose, and meaning into all the organization's functions and activities. Reviews of the plan and operational delivery against it should become a regular part of the culture and feature in periodic communications to staff (all hands meetings) and donor presentations.

Additionally, achieving key milestones should be signaled in marketing and communications with blogs, press announcements, and podium pieces at key conferences.

As cures evolve over the period of a 3-5 year plan, it will be natural to adapt and evolve the pillars; however this must be done strategically with approval of the CEO, leadership team, and the board.