

Strategic Planning for National Governing Bodies of Sport in Ireland



Irish Sports Council

From Kitchen Table to Executive Office

**Strategic Planning Guidelines for
National Governing Bodies of
Sport in Ireland**



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Strategic Planning Guidelines for National Governing Bodies

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Foreword

Everyone involved in sport in Ireland has welcomed the recognition given to sport by the appointment of Dr James McDaid TD as the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation with a seat at the Cabinet table. At last sport is represented at the heart of government.

The creation of the executive Irish Sports Council on a statutory basis is further recognition by the government of the potential importance of sport in Ireland. It is now up to those of us involved in sports organisation and administration to show that sport is worth its place at the “top table”. We have to demonstrate to the Minister and his cabinet colleagues that we can help achieve the strategic goal set for sport in the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation’s Statement of Strategy 1998-2001:

“To formulate and oversee the implementation of policies for the promotion and development of sport, and to encourage increased participation in sport and recreation, particularly by disadvantaged communities”.

Within the Irish Sports Council, one of our key goals - fully endorsed by the Minister and his Department - is to strengthen Ireland’s National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs). We also want to ensure that they are able to take maximum advantage of the improvements in recent years to Ireland’s sporting infrastructure, such as the creation of the National Coaching and Training Centre (NCTC), which will incorporate the 50m pool and other state of the art facilities.

We believe that the best way to strengthen NGBs is to encourage and help them to draw up and subsequently implement a strategic plan. These Strategic Planning Guidelines for National Governing Bodies of Sport provide an overview of why strategic planning is important for NGBs and outline a structured approach to the production of a plan. Inevitably, any publication which seeks to help sports as diverse as athletics, football and mountaineering, to name only three, will probably include material which is irrelevant to some sports and may come at a time when a number of sports organisations have already embraced the strategic planning process.



The Guidelines are designed to be flexible so that they can be adapted by different NGBs to their particular needs. The guidelines are based on a common sense approach to planning, which after all is the essence of a strategic approach to organisation and management in any context. Moreover, many of the basic concepts such as setting goals and planning tactics will already be familiar to anyone who has taken part in competitive sport.

A Strategic Planning Workbook, designed to complement the Guidelines, will guide NGBs through the process and give numerous helpful “tips”. Irish Sports Council staff will be available to offer practical advice to NGBs at appropriate stages in the planning process. Some organisations may feel they need to import “hands on” assistance - the Irish Sports Council may be able to provide contact details for suitable external facilitators.

In terms of the financial support for the programmes agreed as a result of the strategic planning process, the Irish Sports Council will expect funding requests to be realistic and appropriate to the goals, membership levels and stage of development of the NGB. It is especially important that NGBs work closely with the ISC in the drafting of the plan to ensure that expectations of funding support are realistic. Development staff will be available to offer advice and assistance as required by NGBs.

Many NGBs operate on an all-Ireland basis and the Irish Sports Council and Sports Council for Northern Ireland are committed to working closely together. We believe that the guidelines are relevant to the whole island of Ireland and commend them to NGBs and their Provincial Associations both north and south of the border.

Sports organisations must adapt and learn to operate in an environment where all organisations are expected to plan strategically and evaluate on a regular basis. For NGBs, working to implement an agreed plan is the best way to ensure that volunteer and professional time and effort is maximised and funding is invested most effectively. Strong, forward-looking and dynamic sports organisations can deliver opportunities for all to participate and to achieve their potential in sport. Strategic planning is the most effective tool available to the Irish Sports Council and NGBs alike as we work together to ensure the best possible future for sport in Ireland.

Pat O'Neill
Chairman

John Treacy
Chief Executive





Anon's Law of Strategy

Strategy is when you keep right on firing even though you're out of ammunition, in the hope nobody will notice

Igor Ansoff, Corporate Strategy



Glossary of Key Terms

We have tried to write these guidelines in simple English and avoid unnecessary jargon. However, there are some useful terms that need definition. They are:

National Governing Body (NGB): The organisation with responsibility for the development of a sport, recognised by the Irish Sports Council and the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation.

Strategic Planning: The process whereby members of an organisation discuss, agree and describe what is best for their sport and what steps they will take to progress its development.

Vision: It represents the NGB's ultimate aim. Members of an organisation need a vision of what their sport, and its NGB should be like at some point in the future. However, visions must also be realistic. A vision such as "the most popular sport in Ireland" is clearly unrealistic for mountaineering; the "number one sport for the family" equally unrealistic for rugby. An NGB's vision should therefore be challenging but ultimately achievable and reflect the particular nature of the sport. An NGB should seek to "sell" its vision to its internal and external stakeholders so that they can help to achieve it.

Mission: The mission of an organisation sets out simply what it will do to achieve its vision. Everything an NGB does, or wants to do, should be tested against its agreed mission and anything that does not fit the mission should not be progressed.

Core values: The "things we believe in" are our core values. Many people believe in honesty, for example, while others are happy to do dishonest things in order to make money. Typical examples of NGB core values include professionalism; a drugs-free sport; equality for men and women; a lack of discrimination; respect for the rules of the game; excellence in standards of performance and achievement and that their sport should be valued for its own sake rather than for some other reason.





Goals are a key foundation for an NGB's strategic plan. They are long term aspirations which will lead to the achievement of the vision and are compatible with the mission. Goals are difficult to quantify so it can be difficult to say if they have been fully achieved; alternatively, it is always possible to do better against them. Typical goals might be "to promote more junior participation" or "to develop a more efficient administrative structure".

Objectives are things the NGB will set out to achieve which, if successful, will contribute to the achievement of goals. There may be several objectives related to one goal. For example, a goal of promoting more junior participation might lead to a series of objectives such as:

- To develop a "mini" version of the game suitable for primary age children
- To promote the sport in primary or secondary schools (or both)
- To encourage existing adult clubs to start a junior section

Performance indicators are used to measure whether an NGB is being successful in relation to its objectives. A performance indicator relating to an objective of encouraging existing clubs to start a junior section will be the number of clubs with a junior section this year, next year and so on.

Targets relate directly to performance indicators. They are measurable and therefore let NGBs know how they are doing in terms of achieving their objectives. A target might be to have three adult clubs form a junior section in the next year and another six to do so the year after.



Stakeholders are people or organisations who will be affected by the NGB and what it does and may be interested in working with it. Stakeholders can be internal or external.

Internal stakeholders are people who are part of the NGB with an interest in how it goes about its work and what it does. For NGBs, the main internal stakeholders are usually affiliated Provincial / County Associations, elected officials, committee members, clubs, leagues, individual members, coaches, technical officials, parents and professional staff.

External stakeholders are people who are not members of the NGB but interested in what it does or affected by it. They may include recreational players of the NGB's sport, local authorities, facility owners and providers, the media, sponsors, the Irish Sports Council (and possibly the Sports Council for Northern Ireland) and International Federation

SWOT Analysis is used to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the organisation. Looking at the sport and its organisation in this way helps to create a picture of the current state of play and is often useful in deciding a plan of action.

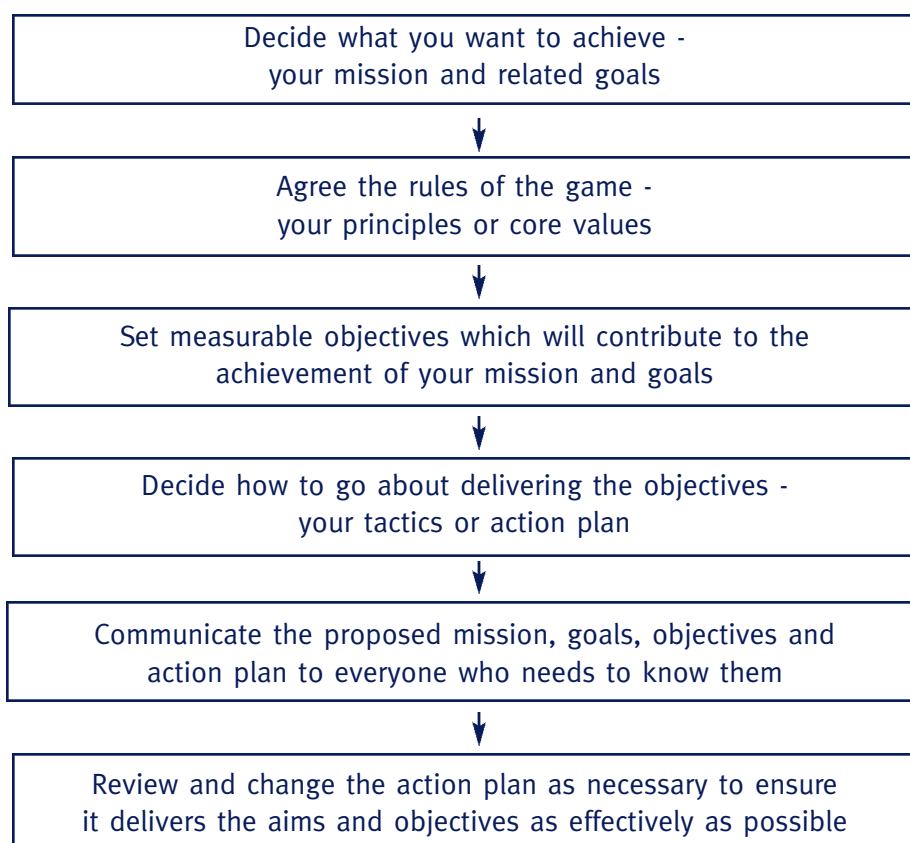




1. Summary of Key Points

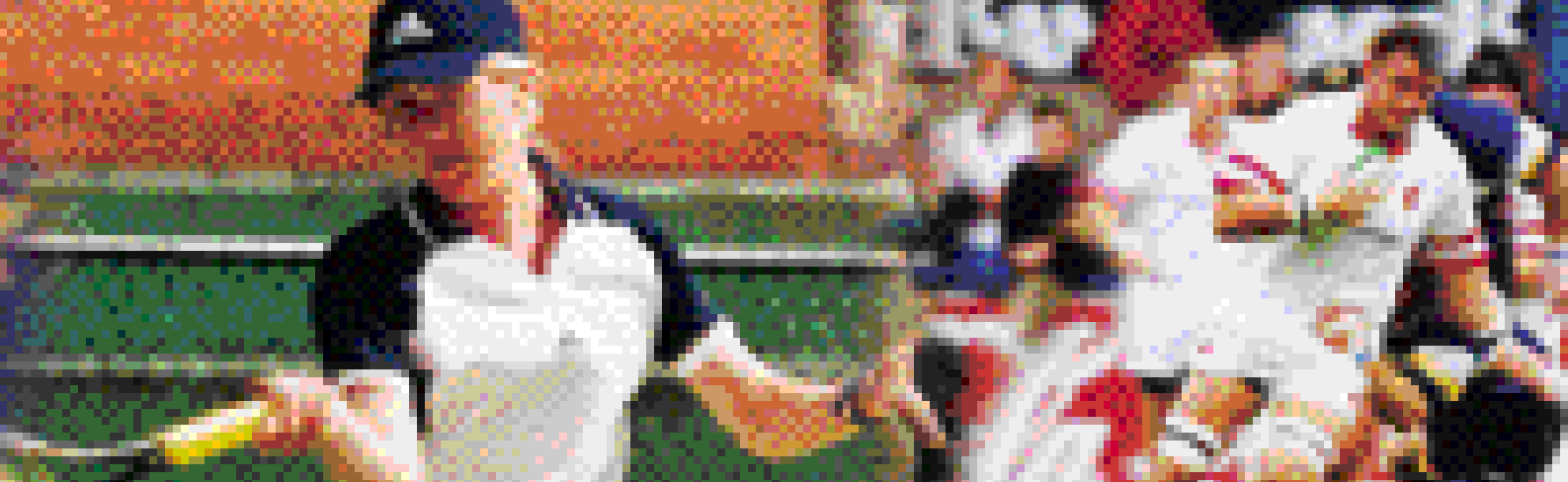
Strategic Planning and NGBs

Everyone who has ever taken part in competitive sport is already familiar with the basic concepts:



The main reasons NGBs need a strategic plan include:

- To concentrate on the long term interests of their sport
- To identify those things which will deliver desirable long term results most effectively
- To build effective partnerships
- To take maximum advantage of the various support services available to them



An NGB's strategic plan should deliver:

- Clarity of purpose
- An action plan with clear targets
- A dynamic organisational structure
- Long term sustainability

Managing Change

The process must be an inclusive one.

The leadership of the NGB has to be committed to the planning process.

The process of producing the plan is more important than the plan itself but what really matters are the results achieved as a result of implementing the plan.

The process takes considerable time and effort and there is no single correct way to produce a strategic plan.

The task of preparing the plan should be undertaken by a dedicated planning team not an existing committee. An external facilitator may be called in to assist this team.

Strategic planning is not infallible but having a plan reduces the risk of future problems.

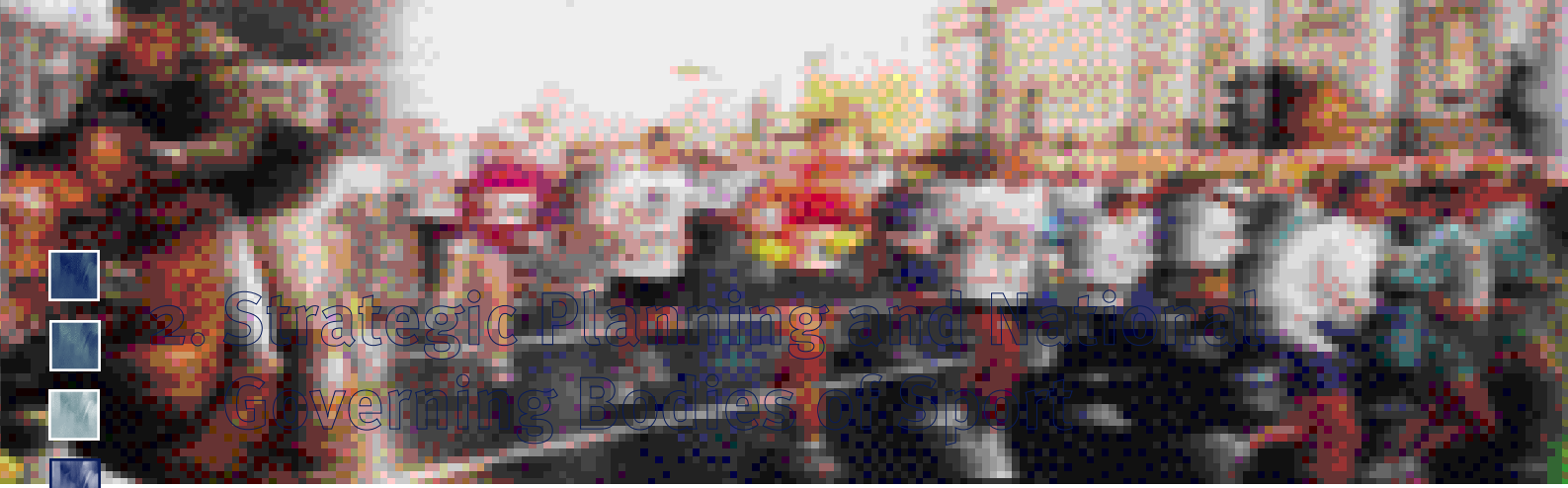
NGBs must “own” their problems if they are to determine effective solutions to them.

The Strategic Planning Process

We suggest you follow a seven step process:

- Step 1: Plan the plan
- Step 2: Analysis
- Step 3: Planning workshop
- Step 4: Synthesis
- Step 5: Consultation and adoption
- Step 6: Implementation
- Step 7: Review





2. Strategic Planning and National Governing Bodies of Sport

Introduction

Whenever teams or individuals take part in competitive sport, their usual aim is to win. Their overall mission might be to win the league, but they also aim to win each match while playing within the rules - the principles by which the sport is played. Right from the start, they know that in order to do so they'll have to score more points or goals than their opponents, or to perform faster or more skilfully. Many will probably also have decided their basic tactics before a specific match or competition starts - to get the ball out to the wing, to play on the opponent's backhand, or to save energy for a sprint finish, for example. And the best competitors are flexible enough to amend their tactics if they aren't working: there's no point in sticking to a pre-conceived game plan if it's totally ineffective. In almost all sports, it's vital to find an effective way of making sure everyone in the team knows the game plan, both at the start and as it evolves during the competition. Imagine what would happen if a hockey team set out to win 8-0 but the half of the team on the right hand side of the pitch decided (without telling those on the left hand half) to close the game down after getting a one goal lead. Described in this way, competitive sport is a good example of strategic planning in action.

"Would you tell me, please, which way I should go from here?"

"That depends on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where," said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"Just so long as I get somewhere," added Alice, by way of explanation.

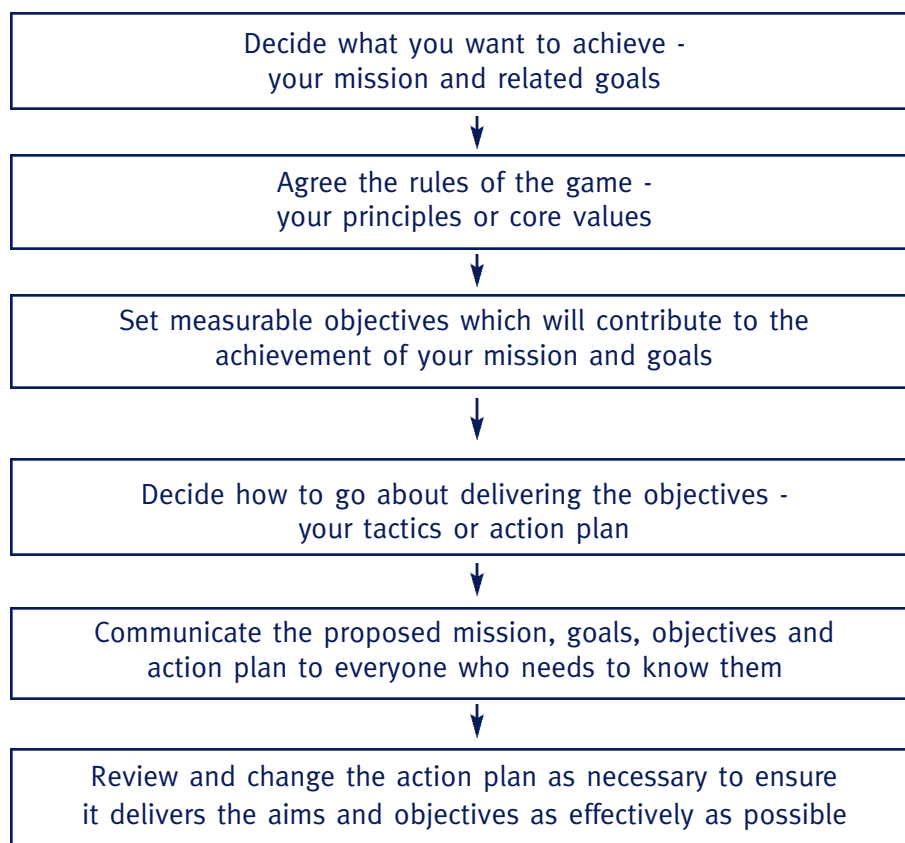
"Oh, you're bound to do that," said that Cat,

"provided you walk long enough."

Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland



It follows that everyone who has ever taken part in competition is familiar with the basic concepts of strategic planning:



There are three types of sports organisation:

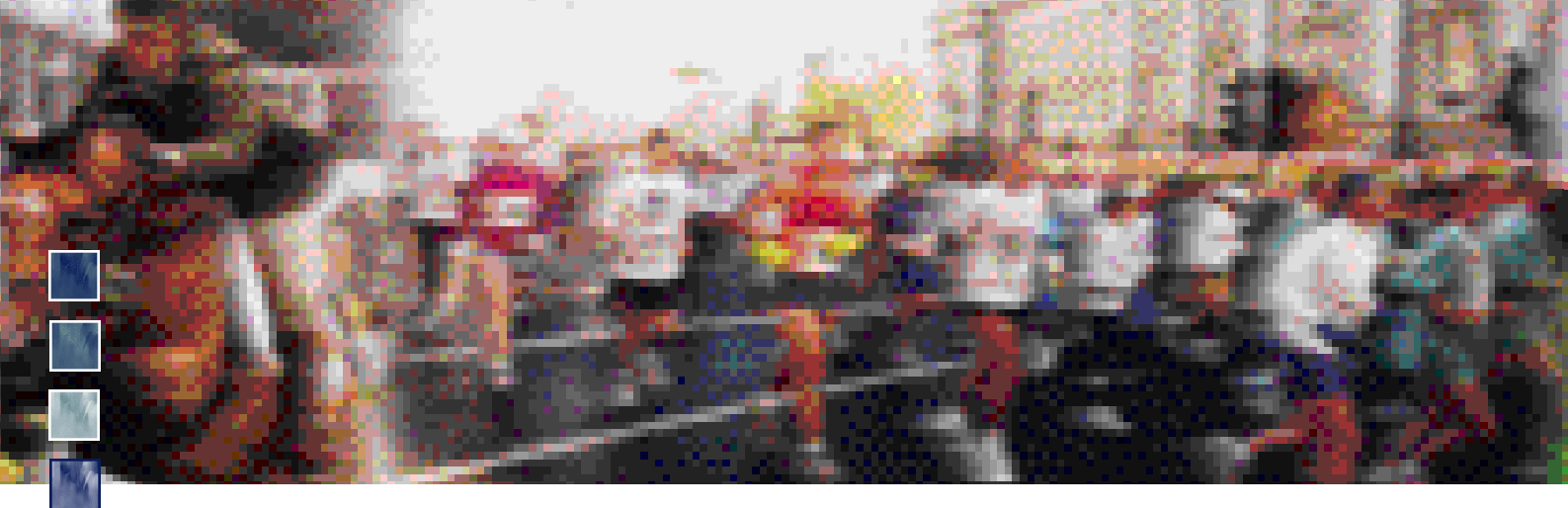
- *Those that wonder what is happening*
- *Those that watch what is happening*
- *Those that make things happen*

Australian Sports Commission, Planning in Sport

Strategic planning for National Governing Bodies (NGBs) - or any other organisation for that matter - follows exactly the same broad approach. So there's really nothing particularly mysterious, which requires specialist expertise; instead it's a process based on relevant information and common sense.

At the outset, approaching the preparation of a strategic plan can seem a pretty daunting task for an organisation like an NGB. It's easy to gather a mass of information - but difficult to use that information in a constructive way to produce a clear and simple plan.





It's easy to think that everything which is currently being done has to be done, pretty much in the same way as at present - but difficult to make hard decisions as to which programmes may have to be scrapped or cut back if resources are limited. It's easy to think that many of the problems faced by governing bodies are outside their control - but difficult to find ways of taking greater charge of their own destiny. These guidelines are designed to help NGBs through the process to produce a viable programme of work that is supported by the members of the organisation. A word of caution however: strategic planning is a matter of horses for courses. Each NGB is as different as the sport / activity it represents. Therefore these guidelines will be used and applied differently by many NGBs.

Each NGB should seek to find a method, format and outcomes, which suit its own particular needs and stage of development.

Why Do NGBs Need a Strategic Plan?

The extensive consultations, which led up to Targeting Sporting Change in Ireland, the first national strategy for sport, identified a general need to strengthen NGBs. It also included a specific proposal to “provide a strategic planning advisory service for NGBs to ensure that they have four year plans in place”. These guidelines, together with the back-up Workbook and other services available through the Irish Sports Council and the NCTC are a direct response to the need identified by sports organisations. The first reason NGBs need a strategic plan, therefore, is to help them become stronger and **more effective** so they can give real leadership to their sport.

Sport in Ireland is changing rapidly and set to change a lot more over the next decade. Future changes cannot always be foreseen and because of this some members might question the sanity of spending time looking for a vision for the organisation in the long term. However, it is easy to spot those organisations who subscribe to this point of view as they are the ones spending most of their time “fire-fighting” - getting blown off course and reacting to a never-ending series of crises as and when they arise. That is why NGBs should have a strategic plan to help them **concentrate on the long term interest of their sport** rather than have to react continually to things over which they have no control. If the NGB doesn't provide





For the first fifty two years of our existence we have operated on the basis of responding to the perceived needs and demands of Irish sailors. The sport and the organisation have now grown to a degree which makes it imperative that we have a clear statement of what our objectives are and how they are to be achieved.”

*Irish Sailing Association,
Strategic Plan 1999-2003*

“This Development Plan is crucial to the development of mountaineering in Ireland in that it both charts a way for drawing together the real strength of the MCI ... and at the same time sets down clearly to outside agencies exactly what we are capable of achieving with their support.”

*Mountaineering Council of
Ireland, Development Plan
1996-1999*

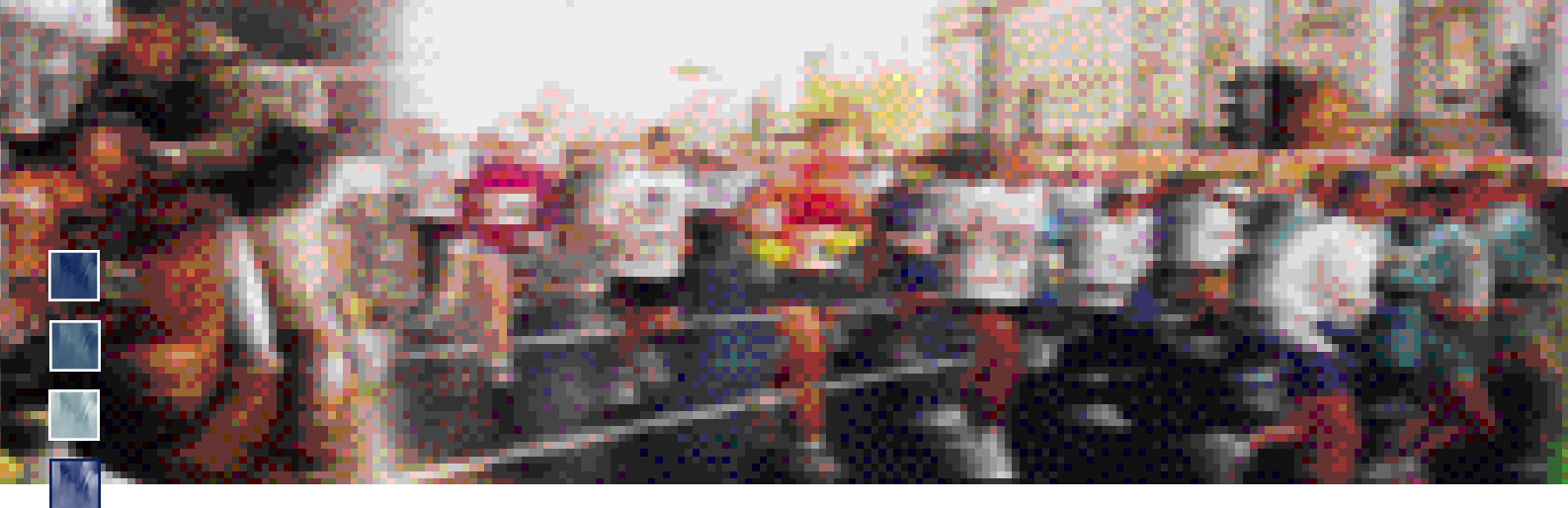
the leadership, which is needed, their sport will suffer. Moreover, a good strategic plan will strengthen the case for grant aid from the Irish Sports Council for a four year period, subject of course to the NGB achieving the objectives agreed in the strategic plan.

There will always be a limit on the amount of cash and resources available to the NGB to do all the things they would like to be able to do. So the third purpose of strategic planning is to **identify those things which will deliver desirable long-term results most effectively**. There's an old maxim - usually referred to as either the Law of Diminishing Returns or Pareto's Law - that 20% of the effort generates 80% of the results in any organisation. Conversely, 80% of the effort generates 20% of the results. Effective strategic planning aims to identify and concentrate on the 20% effort and 80% results, not the other way round.

NGBs are not alone in having to make do with inadequate resources. Almost every organisation has a limit on resources available to them, including the Irish Sports Council! To counteract any shortfall, strong partnerships are needed. So the fourth reason for having a strategic plan is to **build effective partnerships**. There are many organisations with which NGBs can work. An effective partnership is one in which each partner achieves more than would have been possible alone. However, partnerships are easiest to form when each partner has clear objectives with short and medium term priorities. It follows that NGBs wishing to work in partnership will have to know exactly what they want to achieve for their own sport and the resources they will have available. There may even be instances where different NGBs can work in partnership: tennis and squash, for example, because many players of one will also play the other. One example where a number of Irish NGBs already work closely together through the Association for Adventure Sports.

There's also a fifth reason, which is probably uppermost in the minds of some governing bodies. They need a strategic plan because the Irish Sports Council has made clear it wants them to have one. Thinking of a strategic plan as the only way to avoid a reduction in future grant aid to a NGB is misreading the situation.





The Irish Sports Council doesn't so much want as need NGBs to have effective strategic plans for the following reasons:

- To maximise the impact of all the work done in the past few years - the creation and development of the Irish Sports Council, the NCTC and the Player / Athlete Carding Scheme, for example - to build **an effective support infrastructure for Irish sport.**
- **NGBs are key partners** in the job of enriching the lives of all Irish people through sport by developing an active culture in sport, developing an effective organisational structure and providing pathways towards the development of individual fulfilment and high performance. This can only be achieved by working closely with NGBs. The Irish Sports Council needs NGBs to be strong, vibrant, forward-looking organisations providing leadership to and enjoying widespread support from within their sport.
- **Irish Sports Council is accountable to government** for the use of state funding allocated to sport. In order to be able to make the case for more funding for sport it will have to be able to demonstrate that both it and its partners are effective. That can only be done when there is clarity in what each is trying to achieve and how the impact of their work can be measured.
- It needs to **concentrate its limited resources** on delivering the objectives set for it by government and its own policy priorities. Therefore it needs to know which NGBs can do this most effectively, how and what they plan to deliver and the support they will need.

It follows from this that NGBs preparing a strategic plan do not start with a completely blank sheet of paper. Instead, from the start they should seek to develop a partnership with the Sports Council and promote a mutual understanding of missions, goals, responsibilities, resources and strengths. Each NGB's strategic plan should respond to the needs of its sport and not simply repeat Irish Sports Council policies back to it in the hope that this will gain the maximum grant aid.

"There ain't no such things as a free lunch" (Crane's Law)

Arthur Bloch, The Complete Murphy's Laws: A Definitive Collection



There are three “rules of the game” for NGBs to note, and note carefully:

- First, **no NGB has a right to public funding**. If all an NGB seeks to do is to administer its sport in the interests of its members, it is up to those members to provide whatever funding it may need. If public funds are available it will be for the development of the NGB’s sport - for example, bringing in new participants, training coaches, taking part in appropriate international competitions and the like.
- Second, the Sports Council’s role is not simply to deal with grant aid applications in an administrative manner at arm’s length from NGBs so they can carry on with whatever they may have been doing in the past. Past levels of funding are therefore not necessarily a guide to likely future levels. Instead, the Sports Council’s role is to work with NGBs and, where appropriate, **invest** public funds in them in such a way as to make sustainable differences to Irish sport. Investment in NGBs can be long term or it can be time-limited (eg for three years). This support is not open-ended - like any investor, the government and Irish Sports Council seek a tangible return for money and the delivery of worthwhile results.
- Third, although volunteers give their time without payment, **investing in voluntary bodies does not automatically result in good value for money**. What matters is effectiveness. Therefore it is up to NGBs to demonstrate that investing in them is an excellent use of money which will deliver results in a cost-effective manner. In turn, this means that their strategic plans must set out clearly what they plan to achieve, how, when and at what cost.

*“The best way to anticipate
the future is to invent it”*

*Rosabeth May Kanter
When Giants Learn to
Dance*





What Should NGBs Expect Their Strategic Plan to Deliver?

Ultimately, NGBs' strategic plans should deliver results. Those results must reflect and relate to Government and Irish Sports Council policies and priorities but should not be based only on them. They must also be the right ones for the future short, medium and long term development of the NGB's sport.

An NGB's strategic plan must deliver:

- A vision and mission based on **consensus, shared values and agreed priorities** - a clearly defined purpose, expressed in a way that the NGB membership (and partners) understand and wholeheartedly support
- A clear statement of **realistic objectives** with **achievable outcomes** and how they will be delivered and measured - in other words, an action plan with clear targets
- A **dynamic organisational structure** based around effective people with the skills and resources to implement the action plan effectively
- **Long term sustainability:** if the core administrative activities of an NGB will always depend on substantial grant aid they aren't sustainable

The best plans are short and simple - most people can't be bothered to read long, involved documents - and implemented. The Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation's Statement of Strategy 1998-2001, a key document that NGBs must take account of in their planning, is only 31 pages long, three of which are blank with many of the remainder illustrated with photographs.

"After twenty years of operation in Ireland, Special Olympics has reached a point in the development of the organisation where volunteers, staff and financial resources need to be refocused to meet the changing priorities of a growing organisation"

Special Olympics Ireland, A Focus for Our Future: Strategy Plan 1998-2003





If the implementation of a strategic plan delivers results there will be a need to review and amend it from time to time to reflect changing circumstances and build on success. If it doesn't, there will be an even more obvious need to review it. This means that strategic planning **is**:

- A **dynamic, ongoing and systematic process** which is never “finished”
- A way of **building consensus** and shared ownership on what constitutes a “desirable future” and how to achieve it, giving real purpose to an organisation
- A **working tool** to focus on outcomes over a defined period, using hard facts wherever possible
- A way of building **effective interaction** with other bodies

And **isn't**:

- Needed purely to get funding and therefore determined almost completely by the policies, requirements or assumed expectations of funding bodies
- A summary of everything the governing body currently does or has done in the past
- An occasional burst of activity
- An unrealistic wish list for some time in the future
- Restrictive - it can be changed to suit changing circumstances
- A panacea for all problems
- Good in theory but useless in practice
- Dependent on professional expertise which some NGBs may not have
- Something which takes forever
- A large book, which sits on a shelf or in a drawer





Why Should NGBs Discuss their Strategic Plan with the Irish Sports Council?

The NGB is responsible for developments within its own sport so ultimately decisions on its future rests with the membership of the organisation. However, we all have to make decisions based on workable proposals and a realistic financial outlook. In the context of a grant application process, an NGB will rely on the case for funding and support outlined in its strategic plan to stand up to any analysis carried out by the Irish Sports Council in assessing levels of appropriate grant aid. In committing to providing a strategic planning service to NGBs the Irish Sports Council will undertake to provide as much useful guidance as they can to secure the best possible future for each NGB and consequently all involved in Irish sport.

The Irish Sports Council is duty bound to ensure fairness in how every governing body is funded, and each NGB is encouraged to avail of the 'open door policy' to meet with ISC representatives as often as needed. The NCTC as the provider of technical advice and support to NGBs will play a crucial role in the plans the NGBs devise for their coach education programmes and in meeting the needs of their high performance and international players / athletes. All NGBs are advised to avail of the expertise and resources available at the Centre. The Irish Sports Council will work in close co-operation with staff at NCTC to provide the best possible service and back-up to all NGBs as they work on the strategic development of their sport.

NGB grant aid is decided on the basis of applications submitted on an annual basis. In working to provide a strategic planning service and in support of NGBs own development plans, it is the aim of the Irish Sports Council to create multi-year funding cycles based on four-year strategic plans and related annual action plans. In this situation, it would be possible to give a guarantee of funding at a certain level to NGBs for a four-year period, subject to agreed conditions for successful implementation and evaluation of the plan.

*Irish Sports Council Act
1999 section 6 (a) - (d)
Functions of Council:*

(a) to encourage the promotion, development and co-ordination of competitive sport and the achievement of excellence in competitive sport,

(b) to develop strategies for increasing participation in recreational sport and to co-ordinate their implementation by all bodies (including public authorities and publicly funded bodies) involved in promoting recreational sport and providing recreational facilities

(c) to facilitate, through the promulgation of guidelines and codes of practice, standards of good conduct and fair play in either or both competitive and recreational sport.

(d) to take such action as it considers appropriate, including testing, to combat doping in sport.





When Should NGBs Discuss their Strategic Plan with the Irish Sports Council?

NGBs should keep the Irish Sports Council apprised of progress at each stage of the strategic planning process. After all, understanding where an organisation is at, where it wants to go to and how it is going to get there is the basis on which funding support is decided. Constant communication between ISC, NCTC and the NGB can only enhance this understanding.

So, at what stage should an NGB get in touch with the Irish Sports Council?

Each NGB will decide on how it wants to proceed in the strategic planning for its own organisation. However, in terms of progressing the organisation in line with Government and Irish Sports Council policy priorities and in the context of the need to create real working partnerships the following stages might be considered as appropriate:

- 1 Before the start of the process:** at this point the Irish Sports Council will ensure that the NGB is fully aware of Government and Irish Sports Council policy. This is the context in which the plan will be set and should be kept in mind throughout the strategic planning process.
- 2 In the course of development:** perhaps after the first draft to discuss “without prejudice” progress made, so that the NGB gets as much advice as possible from an ISC perspective. These discussions should provide NGBs with the opportunity to present a fuller picture of its sport and how it sees itself developing. In turn, this will help to create an effective working relationship between the ISC and the NGB as the NGB and its membership adopts and works to deliver on targets set out in its plan.
- 3** At the time of submitting its grant application the strategic planning process will have helped NGBs to focus on goals, targets and evaluation systems. Coupled with the work carried out in the planning process, NGBs should have clear expectations of the level of Irish Sports Council support for their plans.





3. Managing Change

Key Principles

Change is almost implicit in the strategic planning process. It's very unlikely that the same people will be doing exactly the same things in exactly the same way after an NGB has prepared a new strategic plan. This means that the strategic planning process is likely to result in changes to the way in which an NGB operates. The move from a familiar "old order" to a comparative unknown means that some people will inevitably regard the preparation of a strategic plan as a threat.

In part, the strategic planning process can be seen as one of promoting change and managing the transition from the present to the future. Change occurs when we have to stop doing something and start doing something else, or do the same thing but in a different way. By and large, NGBs are democratic organisations, composed primarily of volunteers, and the management of change involves considerable discussion and argument before agreement is reached. This is very healthy: it helps to build consensus amongst people who care deeply for the future of the NGB and its sport. But it takes time.

During the planning process, there will be difficult periods when everything seems hopeless, particularly if some people dig in their heels and refuse to budge. In the end, they may decide to withdraw from the NGB. This does not mean the strategic planning process is a failure or should be side-tracked to bring these individuals back into the fold. NGBs often have individuals in positions of authority who have been involved for far too long or whose views have been left unchallenged by other members and, as a result, are very resistant to change.

If NGBs are to be dynamic organisations, concerned with what works, they must have open-minded, forward-looking people in leading roles.

Whatever approach a particular NGB takes to the preparation of its strategic plan, there are a number of key principles it should bear in mind from the start.

"It should be borne in mind that there is nothing more difficult to arrange, more doubtful of success and more dangerous to carry out than initiating changes in a state's constitution. The innovator makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old order."

Nicolo Machiavelli (1514)

"Where there's a will, there's a way" (Gaultieri's Law of Inertia)

Arthur Block, Murphy's Law Book Three: Wrong Reasons Why Things Go More



“The business that is not being purposefully led in a clear direction which is understood by its people is not going to survive”

*Sir John Harvey-Jones,
Making it Happen:
Reflections on Leadership*

First, **the leadership of the NGB has to be committed** to the planning process and the eventual plan right from the outset. If they sit on the fence until it is finished, and then pick and choose the bits they like, the plan is probably doomed. It’s also the case that if there is no commitment to the plan from the start, those in positions of authority may feel they don’t have to argue their case fully during the planning process because they can tinker with the final plan later. Finally, if the leadership comes from the bottom rather than the top the process is not strategic planning but revolution.

Second, **the process must be an inclusive one**, which involves all parts of the governing body and key stakeholders. Canvassing the views of members and involving them in key decisions can be difficult and many members will have difficulty in making constructive suggestions for the future. This is particularly the case when clubs and other members doubt that real change is about to happen - for example, if the NGB’s existing office-bearers are seen to be the only people involved in preparing the strategic plan. If NGB members can be persuaded that a new strategic plan really will make things different “rampant apathy” can often be overcome.

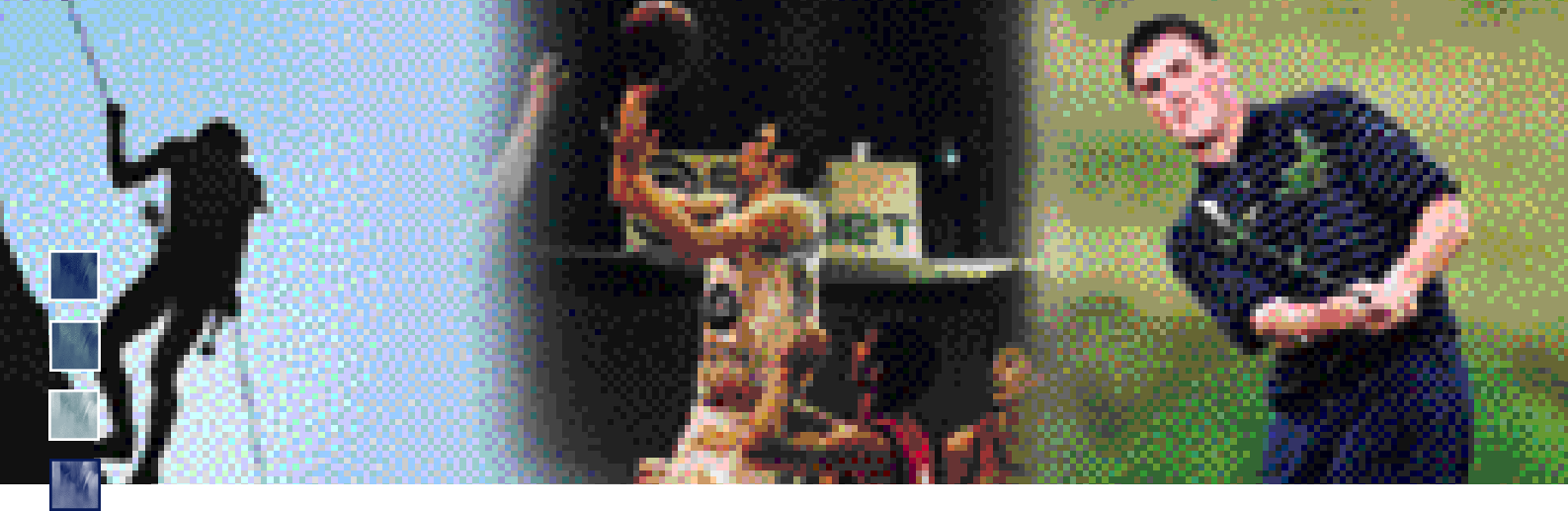
“Effective strategic planning will compel the Union to develop a consensual vision of its future. Achieving consensus as to the way forward will require the constructive participation of everyone involved and interested in securing the future development of the Union.”

*Irish Canoe Union,
Development Plan 1998-
2001*

Although in legal terms NGBs are usually responsible primarily if not exclusively to their members, they also have wider responsibilities relating to the general development of their sport amongst current non-participants. These guidelines have already emphasised the importance of working in partnership whenever possible. Potential partner agencies can be regarded as NGB “stakeholders”: what they do will affect, or be affected by, the work of the NGB. The more that an NGB can base its planning on wide consultation inside and outside its sport, the better.

Third, **the process is more important than the agreed plan document** - which, for some people, can almost be the purpose of the process. It is the process of preparing the plan that generates consensus and shared ownership, not the final printed document, however good it may be. American management guru Tom Peters says that any organisation, which has been through an effective planning process can throw away its plan because everyone should know what is in it, why and be keen to implement it. This reinforces the need for an inclusive planning process.





Fourth, **what really matters are the results** achieved as a result of the planning process and implementing the plan. A strategic plan is not prepared for its own sake, but to determine and deliver desirable outcomes.

Fifth, **the process takes considerable time and effort** but should be based on common sense and not over-complicated or reliant on management jargon.

Sixth, **there is no single, “correct” way to produce a strategic plan;** different NGBs have different needs, face different problems and have different resources and skills.

Who Should Prepare the Strategic Plan?

Each NGB has to adapt the methods described in these guidelines to suit its own organisation. However, the following advice might help avoid some pitfalls in deciding who should produce an NGB’s strategic plan:

- Don’t “bolt on” the task of preparing the plan to the responsibilities of one or more existing committees. If this happens the plan will always tend to be the last item on the agenda and progress will be very difficult to achieve.
- It is accepted that strategic planning must involve wide-scale consultation to reinforce the members’ sense of ownership of the organisation and how it’s run. The plan should not be prepared by one or two office-bearers or specialist “experts” working in isolation; if it is, the plan will almost certainly lack the support required for its successful implementation.

For most governing bodies, the best approach will be to create a small planning team, with a specific individual given the job of putting everything down on paper. The role of the planning team is very much an overseeing one as it should not undertake the work itself. Its job is to be a sounding board; identify individuals or organisations who should be consulted; prevent the plan heading off on irrelevant tangents; monitoring progress; and keeping their executive / key committees and membership informed.

Planning team members should be a mixture of established officials

“The strategy was prepared over the course of a three month period by a strategy team, representative of various grades and work areas in the Department, set up to oversee and drive the process. Senior management at head of division level met on a number of occasions and discussed mandate, mission, stakeholders, customer/client expectations and environmental issues. Subsequently there was an extensive consultation process with all members of staff. Workshops, with independent facilitators, allowed staff in each division to challenge and build upon the work already initiated by the strategy team and senior management.”

Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Statement of Strategy 1998-2001



“The process carried out for the compilation of this Plan has been most successful and productive as it has focused the minds of all participants on where Irish Motor Sport stands today and where it could or should be.”

Royal Irish Automobile Club, Motorsport 2000

and committed individuals who might be willing to become more involved. In picking this team, it is worth noting: existing office-bearers usually have more than enough to do to keep the show on the road while the plan is prepared; and inviting one or more “known troublemakers” to be involved on a “put up or shut up” basis can pay dividends. It’s easy to overlook the fact that many of those who criticise do so because they really care about their sport and want it to be more successful.

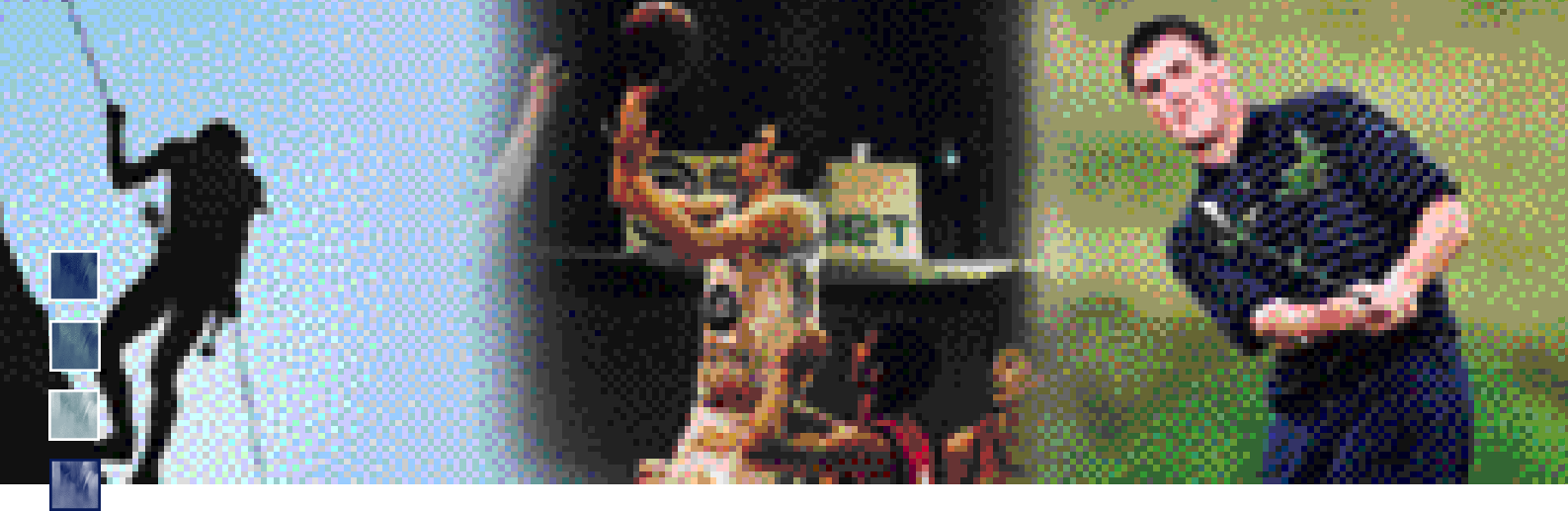
The Use of External Facilitators

External facilitators can be used in two main ways. The first is to appoint consultants to work for the NGB and prepare a draft plan for it to consider. This will almost never be successful. The consultant will be objective, certainly, but this approach does not lend itself to building the shared ownership of the plan which is essential to success.

Moreover, however good or bad the plan may be, it will be too easy for those who do not like “the consultant’s plan” for some reason - for example, it may threaten their position - to argue that it will not deliver the required results or does not reflect the NGB’s views adequately and therefore should be ignored. In these circumstances the money spent on the consultant will be wasted.

The second approach is to use an independent facilitator to help the NGB shape its thinking (but not do that thinking) and prepare its plan. This approach is likely to be more successful as the plan preparation will be assisted by an independent outsider but remain under the control of the NGB. This approach was used by the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation to assist in the preparation of its Statement of Strategy.





The advantages of using an independent facilitator in this way are usually:

- Outsiders are objective and do not bring with them “past baggage”: for the outsider, there are no sacred cows - but for insiders there may be many
- Outsiders may not know (and may well be uninterested) in fine detail but should be able to identify key issues
- Outsiders’ involvement is time-limited and so they can open up cans of worms, which will not be popular with some individuals - although others may heave a sigh of relief
- Outsiders provide a focus for fostering change and may well have relevant experience of how other governing bodies operate
- Outsiders are a temporary extra resource for the NGB, not involved in day to day administration and therefore able to spend time thinking, talking and putting the plan down on paper. This helps to keep up the momentum of the planning process while allowing NGB office-bearers and staff to continue implementing existing policies while the plan is prepared.

Why Do Some NGB Strategic Plans Fail?

Unfortunately, strategic plans are not always successful, although following these guidelines during their preparation and implementation should greatly reduce the potential for failure. The reasons plans may fail include:

- A lack of clear commitment to implementation from the start of the process
- Involving the wrong people in preparing the plan or ignoring the potential contribution of key stakeholders
- Failing to consult adequately with key stakeholders at appropriate stages during the planing process
- Regarding strategic planning as an abstract activity or necessary evil
- Basing the plan on inappropriate facts and opinions
- Taking inadequate account of the context within which the plan will be set and implemented (eg ignoring Irish Sports Council policies and priorities)



- Inadequate analysis of relevant facts, leading to incorrect conclusions
- A failure to “grasp nettles”
- Leaving the preparation of the plan to “strategic planning experts” with inadequate input from the NGB, its members and stakeholders - the ‘top of the pyramid’ ignoring its membership base
- Not allowing enough time for the process
- Taking too much account of the wishes of powerful individuals (some people who see themselves as the solution may actually be the problem) rather than determining and focusing on essentials in an objective manner
- Taking too little account of the resources of people and money likely to be available in the future
- Ignoring the need for widespread support throughout the sport
- Failing to encourage and develop partnerships with other organisations
- Not implementing the plan or reviewing it regularly
- Having an inappropriate NGB structure to deliver the plan

By far and away the most important reason a strategic plan may fail, however, is if the NGB’s office bearers and members take the view that the problems it faces are outside its control. If the NGB does not “own” its problems it is unlikely to be able to come up with effective solutions to them. There a number of key danger signals, including:

Denial of an obvious and growing crisis:

- It’s only a temporary problem
- It’s the result of extraordinary or transient factors
- Everyone is in the same boat
- We’ve seen it all before

“Do nothing” is the right strategy:

- As the problems are temporary and beyond our control, all we can do is sit them out
- We must not be panicked into a hasty, knee-jerk reaction





Self delusion:

- We have some minor problems which are out of our control, but most things are going well
- Things can't go on like this and must improve soon
- Our problems aren't critical and things are looking up
- Recovery is under way

Going for easy targets:

- Tightening control systems - for example, by reducing the number or autonomy of sub-committees or team managers
- Cutting costs and concentrating on the budget rather than strategic direction
- Abandoning anything which is not tried and tested

Declining morale:

- Lack of new volunteers getting involved
- Good people becoming frustrated and resigning
- Existing office-bearers taking on more and more jobs because no one else will do so

Any NGB which recognises these characteristics in itself is on a downward spiral of decline. It may also find the preparation of a strategic plan an impossible task because key office-bearers will not be willing to "let go" but unable to afford the time which will be needed to prepare the plan. The only possible solution may be outside intervention - and, more than likely, resignations at the top of the governing body. However, these guidelines are a blueprint to arrest this decline or address members' concerns - after all, an NGB with an effective strategic plan shouldn't get itself into this position in the first place.





4. The Strategic Planning Process

Introduction

All strategic plans have three basic elements:

- Where are we today? - the starting point for the plan
- Where do we want to be at some time in the future? - the vision, mission, goals and objectives
- How do we get there? - the action plan

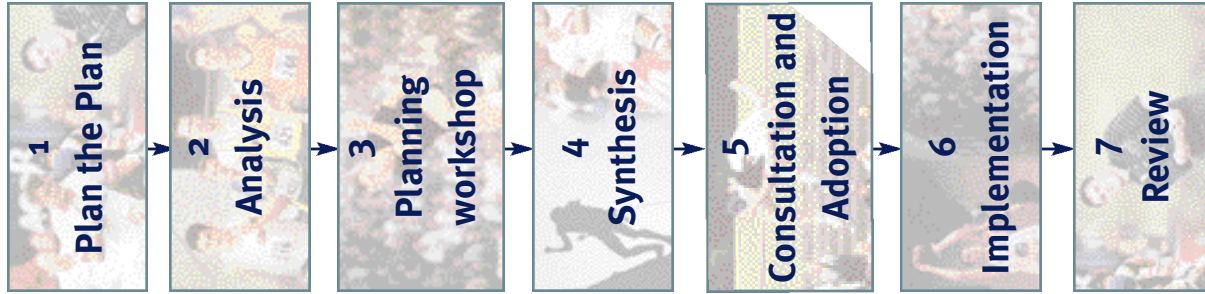
The process of actually producing a plan isn't so easily structured under these three headings; for example, they do not obviously include a means of getting a plan adopted or a regular review of it. One answer is to follow a seven-step process:

- Step 1 Plan the plan
- Step 2 Analysis
- Step 3 Planning Workshop
- Step 4 Synthesis
- Step 5 Consultation and adoption
- Step 6 Implementation
- Step 7 Review

The process, and the role of the various “key players” involved in it, is summarised in the diagram overleaf. The Strategic Planning Workbook, which NGBs can use as a day to day guide to the process, is also based on this seven step process.



The Strategic Planning Process



The role of the NGB Executive

- Consult the Irish Sports Council
- Agree the need for the plan
- Appoint Planning Team
- Commit publicly to the plan
- Inform membership
- Run the NGB during the planning process

- Agree and circulate the summary of the NGB's strategic direction to key stakeholders
- Put the plan, and new constitution if necessary, on the agenda for adoption at the AGM or SGM
- Launch the plan

- Select and appoint Directors or Committees as appropriate
- Implement the Plan

- Prepare a report on the past year for the membership at the AGM
- Give the plan a 10,000 mile service every year
- Thoroughly review the plan every four years

The role of the Planning Team

- Identify key stakeholders
- Draw up plan programme
- Select and brief external facilitator (if required)

- Undertake or oversee
- External analysis
- Internal analysis
- Preparation of Analysis Report

- Plan the Planning Workshop
- Make the necessary administrative arrangements

- Prepare or oversee the first draft of the NGB's strategic direction
- Prepare or oversee drafts of the plan
- Draw up the consultation plan

- Draft or oversee a new constitution (if required)
- Consult stakeholders
- Present the plan to the membership at the AGM

The role of the external facilitator

- Advise the Planning Team as necessary

- Assist and advise the Planning Team as necessary

- Prepare for and lead the Planning Workshop

- Prepare a first draft of the NGB's overall strategic direction
- Write and amend the draft plan as required by the Planning Team

- Assist and advise the Planning Team

Key consultations

- Consult the Irish Sports Council before doing anything else
- Discuss the "Plan for the Plan" with ISC

- Discuss the Analysis Report with the NGB/NCTC Technical Liaison Group

- Consult key stakeholders on the overall strategic direction

- Before the AGM:
 - Consult the Irish Sports Council for an informal reaction to the plan
 - Consult internal and external stakeholders, including the NCTC

- Submit the plan with the first year's action plan and grant aid application to the Irish Sports Council
- Involve stakeholders and partners as appropriate

- Include review of progress in annual meeting with ISC
- Use the NGB/NCTC Technical Liaison Group as a "sounding board" each year



Step 1: Plan the Plan

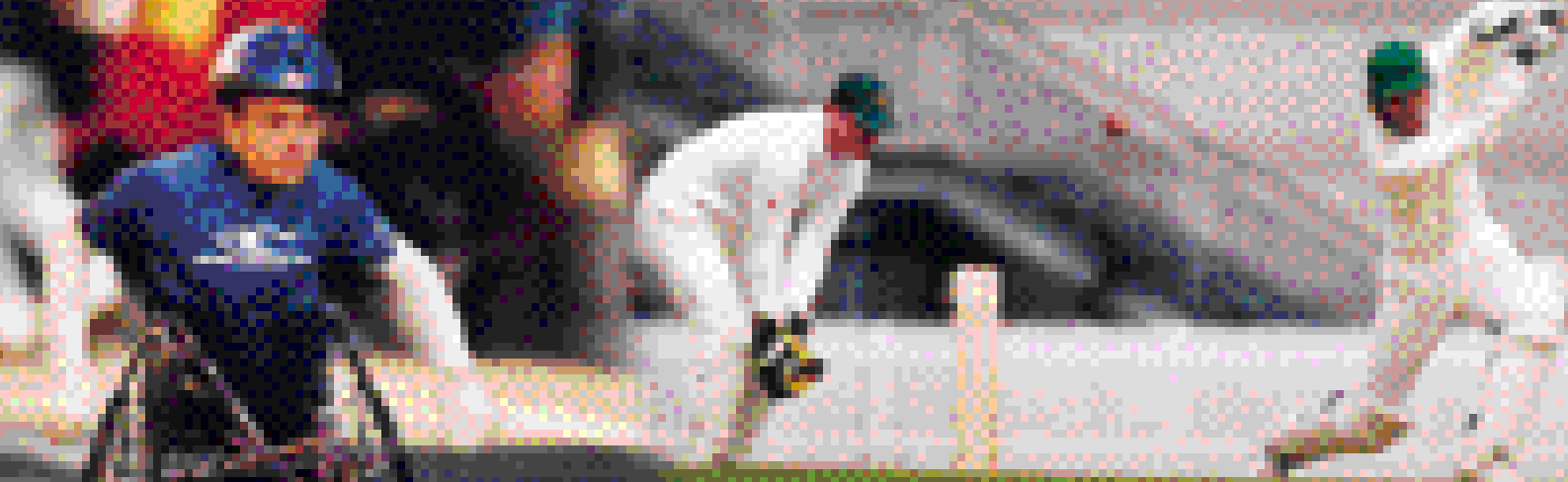
Before the work of actually producing the plan can really start, a number of key decisions have to be taken. These decisions will affect the eventual outcome, so they require careful consideration:

- **The composition of the “planning team”:** the last section suggested the creation of a team to oversee the planning process. This should be a group of no more than about half a dozen people - more than this and it can be very difficult to arrange meetings - who are committed to the long term good of the NGB and its sport. Ideally, they should have no personal axes to grind: they are on the planning team to represent the sport as a whole, not a particular interest group within the NGB. At least one member should also be on the most important committee within the NGB (usually the Executive or Council) so they can keep it informed. However, the other members do not have to be in positions of authority, although they should be respected within the sport and knowledgeable about both it and the NGB. Indeed, it is often better if they are not key office-bearers, who usually have many meetings to attend and in any case have to run the NGB during the planning process.
- **How the plan is going to be prepared:** at the outset it is important to determine whether the plan preparation is to be done completely “in-house” or will involve an external facilitator and the broad approach to be adopted. This guide is intended as a template which NGBs can adapt to their own particular needs.
- **Identify key internal stakeholders:** NGBs have a number of internal stakeholders who will be affected directly by the planning process and outcomes of the plan. These will include:
 - u The NGB’s membership (eg individuals, clubs, local leagues, counties or Provinces)
 - u Key officials: the NGB’s Treasurer or Director of Finance is usually a key figure in any strategic planning process, not least because they tend to be in post for a considerable number of years and have to prepare budgets; there are usually others as well





- u Chairs and possibly members of key committees or sub-committees
 - u Professional staff: NGB staff, if any, are likely to be affected by the preparation of a strategic plan. They must be included in the process so that they cannot gain the impression the plan is being prepared behind their backs. They should also have a lot to contribute; if not, they may be the wrong staff and this will be an issue which will have to be tackled
 - u Leading performers: NGBs involved in competitive sport will almost inevitably have a section relating to high performance in their strategic plan. Accordingly it makes sense to view the sport's leading athletes as key stakeholders
 - u Others: individual governing bodies should be able to identify other key internal stakeholders such as coaches and the parents of junior team members
- **Decide on the key external stakeholders:** NGBs also have external stakeholders - the organisations with which they interact such as sponsors, the Irish Sports Council and NCTC. In addition, if there are outside organisations with which the NGB is likely to wish to work in partnership, it will often help to bring them in to the planning process. In many instances external stakeholders will not wish to be involved on an ongoing basis but this does not mean they should be ignored.
 - **Set a broad timetable for the planning process:** preparing a strategic plan nearly always takes longer than expected at the outset, so build some "float" time into any programme for the preparation of a plan. When setting the overall programme, the key dates on which to base the plan timetable are usually:
 - u The date of the NGB's AGM, which provides an opportunity for the membership to consider and hopefully adopt the plan without the expense of calling a Special General Meeting
 - u The end of the NGB's financial year: the best time to start implementing a new strategic plan is at the beginning of a financial year. This allows an existing budget to continue while the plan and related new budget are prepared; it also allows subscription levels to be reviewed from the start of the plan's implementation if necessary



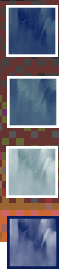
- u When the NGB has to submit its plan to the Irish Sports Council and, for all-Ireland bodies, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland. Any deadline set by one or other Council will obviously be a critical date to take into account when planning the plan. Ideally, however, any NGB will also want to try to ensure that the Irish Sports Council and Sports Council for Northern Ireland will be willing to support its plan before submitting it. Accordingly it will be sensible to discuss the plan with one or both Councils as it evolves and the Guidelines indicate appropriate stages in the planning process to do this.

The other key elements of Step 1 are:

- **Give a commitment to implement the plan** from the top of the NGB before it is started; this will demonstrate to the membership and Irish Sports Council that the NGB is taking the planning process seriously. In turn, this should help to bring people into the process because they realise that change is possible.
- **Let the NGB membership know** about the proposal to prepare a new strategic plan, who is on the planning team, why the plan is needed, the timetable for its production and invite contributions, for example through an established newsletter. If the NGB has no newsletter a mailing to members may be needed. It is almost inevitable that rumours about the content of the plan will start and the NGB should be open and the process transparent right from the start.
- Ensure that the existing committee or administrative structure is able to **“keep the show on the road”** during the planning process

Finally, the Irish Sports Council is in an ideal position to help each NGB learn and benefit from the experience of others in relation to strategic planning. Therefore it will be a good idea to invite the ISC to review and comment on the “plan for the plan” at the outset. It may well be able to identify sources of relevant information of which a particular NGB is not aware or suggest ways of tackling the production of parts of the plan which have worked well for other NGBs.





Step 2: Analysis

The first step in the actual plan preparation is to prepare a statement of “where we are today”. As much as possible this should be factual, although conclusions and trends should also be included. The analysis should relate to both the external context within which the NGB operates and its own internal policies and programmes. Its overall purpose is to set the scene for the remainder of the planning process. It does this by identifying the context within which the plan will be set; taking stock of what the governing body does and how effective it is; and summarising the key issues the strategic plan must tackle.

2a: The External Context

No plan exists in isolation; instead, it is set in a particular context and should be part of a “cascade” of plans which should inter-relate and reinforce each other. This cascade is both “top down” and “bottom up”. In top down terms, for example, the policies and priorities in the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation’s Statement of Strategy 1998-2001 (May 1998) set the context for the Irish Sports Council; its policies set the context for NGB plans; they set the context for Provincial or County plans; and they set the context for club plans. However, NGBs will have to obtain the support not only of the Irish Sports Council but also their members for their plan and therefore will have to take full account of their wishes when preparing it - the bottom up part of the planning cascade. This may seem very bureaucratic at first, but is actually common sense because ultimately it means everyone should be pulling in the same direction.

As it continues to evolve and grow there is an increasing responsibility on the Union to adopt an integrated and cohesive approach to its management, co-ordination and objectives. The future development of canoeing ... depends on the Union’s ability to respond effectively to the demands, changes, and challenges of the future”

*Irish Canoe Union,
Development Plan 1998-
2001*





There is no need for the external analysis to be long or complex: a bullet point summary of no more than about a dozen key points which the NGB should take on board is usually adequate. One way of structuring them is under four headings in a “PEST” analysis:

- **Political** factors such as the government’s commitment to increasing participation in sport by those who are disadvantaged for some reason, particularly young people, and desire for greater accountability in voluntary bodies
- **Economic** factors such as the potential sport offers to create employment or work with tourism interests
- **Social** factors such as the changing role of women, the need to provide a safe environment for participants and changing work patterns
- **Technological** factors such as competition from computer games for children’s time and the impact of the internet and e-mail on NGB administration

It can be useful to follow each bullet point in a PEST analysis by its implication for the NGB and its sport: for example, one implication of changing work patterns is that there may be scope to develop coaching courses for adult participants during normal working hours.

*“Ah, but would some Power
the giftie gie us
Tae see oorselves as ithers
see us”*

Robert Burns

2b: Internal Analysis

The internal analysis, perhaps paradoxically, can be a lot more difficult; certainly it should be wide-ranging and cover all the current work of the NGB. Again, the analysis need not be long-winded and can be prepared in bullet point form. But it must build up to a factually based, wholly objective and, if necessary, brutally frank picture of the NGB.

Governing bodies were originally created in response to a need to codify the rules of different games and promote competitions. Over the years, however, many other activities have been “bolted on”, often in response to pressures from outside their sport and direct membership, but without any reduction in their traditional functions. One result is the available resources of people and money are





stretched thinner and thinner; the more they try to do the less they are effective and the more dissatisfied their members or funding bodies become. Alternatively they can find themselves pulled in different directions by outside forces or individuals with a personal agenda. The analysis stage allows the NGB to take stock as a prelude to the production of the plan.

Wherever possible, basic facts and figures should relate to the way in which the NGB is structured; for example, a breakdown by Province will often be more useful than overall figures for Ireland as a whole. This will also allow the NGB to identify trends over time and benchmark its performance against other NGBs. The main areas to review are described below.

International Comparisons

NGBs for competitive sports are fortunate in that they normally take part in international competitions and are therefore in a position to learn from the work and experience of the NGBs for their sport in other countries at first hand. For all sports, however, there may well be merit in exchanging strategic plans with other countries, especially the most successful ones for each NGB's sport. There is no need constantly to re-invent the wheel and Irish NGBs may be able to learn and benefit from the experience of other countries. At the very least, each NGB will then have the opportunity to study one or more strategic plans for its sport early in the planning process. However, there is no point in simply copying a successful plan from another country; circumstances will be different and the plan must be based on the needs of the sport in Ireland.

Established mission, aims and objectives

Every NGB should have a statement in its constitution or Memorandum and Articles of its "objects" - the reasons why it exists. More often than not, however, these objects are fairly vague or all-encompassing as those drafting them in years gone by wanted to ensure they could do almost anything. If so, they are unlikely to have the clarity of purpose and concentration on doing a limited number of things well which should be the foundation of a strategic plan. In spite of this it is worth summarising them as they may need revision as a result of the planning process.





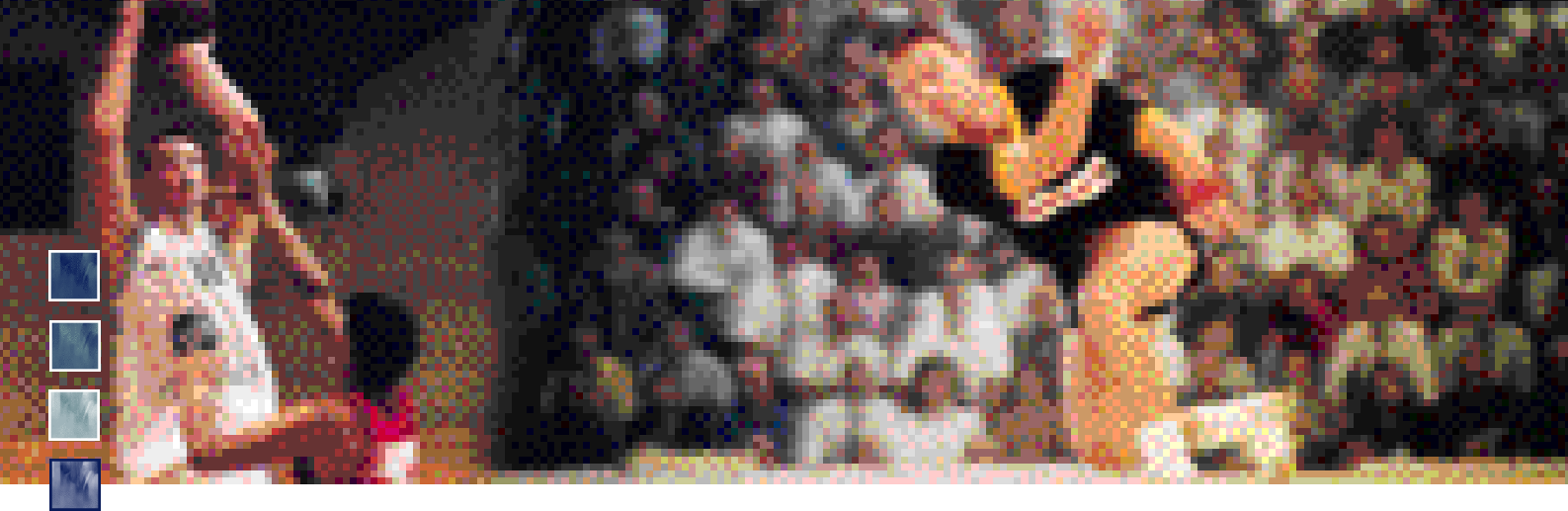
Where NGBs have an existing strategic or development plan it may include a mission statement, goals or objectives - and ideally all of them. If so, they should be included in the analysis report and all the NGB's work evaluated against them as appropriate. In some instances it is likely that goals or objectives will have been set and then ignored; if so, this should be highlighted.

Basic facts and figures

All NGBs keep records although the quality and quantity of them varies widely, as does the extent to which they are used. Over time, there is always a tendency to continue keeping records without ever reviewing why particular information is retained. A review of existing NGB records can identify both trends, for example in the number of members in different categories, and a need to start keeping specific records or record information in a different way, for example by making better use of information technology. Try to identify:

- Trends in participation in the NGB's sport, in Ireland and internationally.
- Club or membership trends over the past several years, taking careful account of the age of members - is the sport appealing sufficiently to young people and specific groups such as women or people with disabilities?
- The number of teams in local leagues over the past several years - and the age of teams; is the average age of each team increasing by one every year? If so, the sport may be failing to attract new competitors.
- The number of coaches and match officials, together with their qualifications and how active they are.
- The usefulness of existing methods of record keeping and the use of records.
- Key ratios which can be used to assess the effectiveness of the NGB's work - for example, the number of members per qualified coach or the number of carded athletes compared with the membership of the NGB.





Organisational Structure and Committees

It is unlikely that many NGBs will have reviewed their organisational and committee structures in recent years; instead, the tendency is simply for more and more committees to be appointed, often with little noticeable impact on the overall level of activity of the NGB. Too many committees, with too many members and too many too long meetings, can actually hamper the work of an NGB and make it less effective than it might otherwise be. Committees should exist, if at all, to make decisions and oversee their implementation. Far too often however, committees become simply representative or even information-exchanging bodies, allowing every shade of opinion to have its say on every issue and reaching decisions which represent the lowest common denominator of what everyone present will accept. Produce a chart summarising the structure of the NGB and the responsibilities of key committees and the relationships between them. Review the membership, purpose and work of established committees:

- How many actually decide very little but take many meetings and hours to do so?
- How many exist primarily to exchange information rather than make decisions?
- Where is there duplication of effort with one committee doing little other than reporting or making recommendations to another?
- Do some committee members consistently fail to turn up? If so, this is a clear indication that the committee may be perceived by them as a waste of time.
- How are committee decisions actually implemented?

It will also be sensible to review the Constitution or Memorandum and Articles to ensure that the NGB's members and voluntary office-bearers will have adequate protection in the event of legal proceedings against the NGB.

"... the central organisation of Irish Motor Sport has evolved on an ad hoc basis with each committee dealing in isolation with its particular problems and on a reactive rather than on a proactive basis ... In addition, many committees are overburdened with meetings and the business with which they have to deal. However, the fact that committees act in isolation is the major factor hampering the progress of Irish Motor Sport."

Royal Irish Automobile Club, Motorsport 2000





Stakeholder views

NGBs may have many stakeholders, each with a view of what it should be doing and how it is currently performing. The views of external stakeholders, in particular, can be very illuminating, but it is also worth seeking internal stakeholder views and concerns:

- Review AGM minutes - what issues or concerns have members raised in recent years and have they been dealt with adequately?
- Undertake a questionnaire survey of clubs
- Arrange roadshows or consultation meetings with Provinces and clubs in their areas
- Establish the views of external stakeholders and the potential for developing partnerships with them

Specific NGB Programmes

Most NGBs have evolved a series of programmes, for example related to the training of coaches or officials. Review the success of all such established NGB programmes, such as

- National Coaching Development Programme
- Club development
- Recreational sport
- Sport for young people
- Sport for girls and women
- Sport for people with a disability

The Strategic Planning Workbook gives some suggestions as to how these reviews can be undertaken.





High level competition

NGBs for competitive sports usually take part in a range of high level or international competitions. However, there is also a tendency to continue to take part in the same competitions without reviewing the benefits of doing so. International programmes should always be carefully planned and targeted to deliver benefits for leading Irish sportsmen and women, not officials. In addition, NGBs might look to attract a particular international event to Ireland for the prestige it will bring, while ignoring the fact that this expenditure of time and money might be better used to promote participation by Irish people. NGBs should review the costs and benefits of:

- Participation in high level and international competitions
- Attracting international events to Ireland and whether any past events have generated real benefits for the NGB and its sport; it should also be worth consulting other NGBs which have recently staged major events to see how they have sought to maximise the long term impact of any major event for their sport in Ireland

Volunteering

NGBs depend upon volunteers but it is becoming more and more difficult to attract volunteers to administrative positions. One result can be that NGBs become cliques with the AGM little more than a game of musical chairs as officials swap jobs. This will then become ever more self-perpetuating as “outsiders” believe that real change is very unlikely. Review trends in volunteering to identify the extent to which new volunteers are coming forward and, if there is a problem, why this should be so.

Facilities

Most sports require facilities but Ireland does not have a good stock of some facilities. Review the provision of facilities - for example, their quantity, quality, location, who owns them, how the NGB can use them and the availability of or need for any special facilities for high level training or competitions. The Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation is likely to seek the views of NGBs through ISC on applications for capital grant aid for key facility developments.





Partnerships/Support Services

NGBs do not have the resources to allow them to do everything which might be desirable to develop their sport and so must actively seek to develop partnerships with other agencies and make use of available support services. Review:

- Opportunities for the NGB to develop effective partnerships
- The NGB's use of NCTC services
- The NGB's success in getting and keeping sponsors
- The use the NGB makes of sports science and sports medicine support for its top athletes

Image and Communications

Sport is competing with many other activities for participants and so effective public relations are essential. In spite of this, many NGBs bemoan the lack of publicity for their sport, particularly at the amateur level. Review:

- The image of the NGB and its sport to members and outsiders
- Internal communications within the sport
- External communications with the public
- Marketing and promotion of the NGB's sport

Staffing

A number of NGBs employ professional staff and several more would like to do so. After volunteers, staff are an NGB's greatest asset. However, the management of paid staff is not easy for a voluntary body. In addition, there is always a danger that when volunteers see someone being paid for what they believe they used to do for nothing they offload further hitherto voluntary work on to staff. When this happens the staff become overburdened with day to day matters and can find it very difficult to do the job they were appointed to do. The benefits of having paid staff are then much less than originally anticipated by the NGB and expected by funding bodies.





As part of the analysis stage, therefore, NGBs with professional staff should review:

- Job descriptions and whether staff are actually working to them
- How the work of paid staff and voluntary officials dovetails together
- Staff training needs, either in relation to the voluntary structure of the NGB and how it works or more general skill such as the use of information technology
- Staff salaries and conditions of service

Administration and Use of Information Technology

Information technology should have had a significant impact on the way NGBs operate in ways ranging from the use of simple mailing lists to desk top publishing and e-mail. In spite of this, there may still be examples of what are now archaic working practices in some NGBs. For example, NGBs tend to do an enormous amount of photocopying and mailing, both of which are time consuming and can be fairly expensive. As many people who will be involved in NGBs as volunteers will be able to access the internet either at home or work, it may be possible to make more effective use of office staff's time by using e-mail. There may also be other ways in which administrative procedures could be streamlined such as using a computer package for accounting.

Finance

The easiest and by far the worst way to produce a budget is to take last year's income and expenditure figures and add a percentage for inflation. Such an approach stifles change. As organisations with limited financial resources of their own, NGBs need to use money as effectively as possible. As a first step in reviewing how the NGB should spend its money, analyse the NGB's management accounts over the past several years to determine where the money comes from and where it goes. For clarity always use gross figures rather than net ones: for example, the cost of running the national championships should be seen as an income of £1,000 and an expenditure of £1,100, not a net expenditure of £100. It will also help to split expenditure into "pay" (including PRSI & pension contributions) and "non-pay" costs such as training courses, tournaments and other events, travel and subsistence, postage, office supplies, etc.





In broad terms, most NGBs should aim progressively to reduce their dependence on outside sources of funding. In particular, the less they depend on grant aid the more they are their own masters. A useful and possibly revealing analysis can be to calculate the proportion of expenditure met from various sources of income, such as membership fees, sponsorship or State grant, over the past several years.

Outcomes

The ultimate emphasis in any strategic plan must always be on outcomes - what is actually achieved. In order to provide basic information for the plan, compare inputs (for example, of cash and time) with outcomes and try to determine value for money, if necessarily on a subjective basis. It is often the case that large amounts of time and money are expended to achieve relatively little - an example of the 80:20 rule in action.

2c: Summary Report

The outcome of Step 2 should be a “warts and all” summary of the findings of the analysis stage which also sets out the key issues the governing body must tackle and the resources it already has available or could seek to get in the future. It doesn’t need to be particularly long (a bullet point format is usually fine) but must be clear and identify the key issues the NGB must tackle. It can also be useful to include a SWOT analysis, although there is often a tendency to view this as an end in itself, including too much and then taking little notice of it. Useful headings for the analysis report can include:

- Organisational history
- Organisational structure
- Existing vision, mission, goals and objectives
- Resources: essentially money and people’s time
- Club, local or regional development
- Marketing and promotion

“You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs”

Josef Stalin





- Key issues for the future
- Performance benchmarking
 - u Sport for young people
 - u Recreational sport
 - u High performance sport
 - u Facilities
 - u Organisation, co-ordination and communication
 - u Training of volunteers and officials (eg umpires)
 - u Coach education, development and deployment

Each section should identify existing objectives and targets if they exist; resources used to try to deliver them; and outcomes.

At this stage it can be useful to get an independent response to the analysis from someone who knows the NGB and the people involved in it but is not part of it. This is a role which the NCTC/NGB Technical Liaison Group should be well placed to perform, and the planning team should also refer to development personnel at the ISC office.

As likely as not, rumours will start as soon as the analysis report is produced and some people will convince themselves, often with no evidence, that it has been or will be kept from them. Such rumours and misinformation can seriously harm the strategic planning process because they usually take a disproportionate amount of effort to overcome and divert attention from more important matters. If someone asks for a copy, make sure they get it - another reason for keeping the Analysis Report as short as possible. It will also be sensible to circulate the analysis report to affiliated Provinces, counties or clubs (as appropriate) to make the point that the whole of the planning process is open and transparent.

Q: What's the best way to eat an elephant?

A: One bite at a time



Step 3: Planning Workshop

NGBs tend to find gathering a mass of analytical information comparatively easy but deciding what to do with it much more difficult. One response is to undertake more analysis, but this can be counter-productive because the problem of deciding what is really important becomes even more difficult. However, Step 3 is the critical one in terms of shaping the eventual plan because it is the stage in which the “big” decisions are taken. These big decisions relate primarily to three things:

- The NGB’s vision of the future
- The NGB’s mission
- The NGB’s key goals

Those involved in this stage of the process must take care not to get bogged down in detail; instead they must concentrate on setting the overall direction and priorities of the governing body for the next few years. This means that they must ignore established programmes, committees or other structures and individual interests or loyalties and seek instead to “re-invent” the role of the governing body, almost as if it did not exist. Furthermore, the process must neither be rushed nor led by any particular interest group within the NGB.

Possible approaches are:

- The task can be undertaken by the planning team. This approach tends almost inevitably to be dominated by existing office-bearers complete with their “baggage” and, if so, may well end up doing little more than reinforcing the status quo.
- One or two day intensive, interactive workshop with key people who will be involved in implementing the eventual plan, although not all of them should be office-bearers or committee members.





While the other approaches may be appropriate in some instances, in most cases a planning workshop offers the best prospect of success. Key characteristics of successful workshops are:

- They should last a minimum of a day and ideally a weekend from say lunchtime on the Saturday to after lunch on the Sunday. While the actual workshop time could be condensed into a single day, the opportunity to socialise and continue the discussions in an informal manner on the Saturday night can help decision-making or allow ruffled feathers to be smoothed.
- They should involve 12-20 people, carefully selected to include a blend of those already in authority within the NGB and people not directly involved at present, but with their own views on how the NGB should develop in future and possibly potential office-bearers or committee chairs. Individuals in this category should be known to office-bearers or may be identified during the analysis stage. Again, it may be worth including some individuals who have in the past been critical of the NGB, provided they can be constructive. If the present office-bearers dominate there is a danger the workshop will simply reinforce the status quo, while if “outsiders” dominate they may not appreciate why the NGB has adopted its present policies. It follows that neither group should have a clear majority. If appropriate, workshops may also include one or two key external stakeholders or potential partners.
- They should be planned and led by someone who is not aligned with any constituent part of the NGB so that all present can see them as neutral with no particular axe to grind. This will often, although not necessarily, require an external facilitator.
- They should be held at a “neutral” venue, not associated with any specific part of the NGB (such as a hotel or University) so that participants will not be distracted or called away. Ideally there should be residential accommodation so the informal discussions can proceed late into the Saturday night.
- The venue must be equipped with visual aids (at least a flip chart and whiteboard and possibly an overhead projector and screen) and space for the workshop to split into small groups from time to time.



A well planned and facilitated workshop is both stimulating and exhausting. It will tend to be most effective when all those present already know one another as this will save time on “ice-breaking”. There must also be two ground rules, rigidly enforced by the facilitator:

- The workshop is concerned with the future, not the past: it should not go over old ground and re-visit old arguments
- There are no sacred cows: anything can be scrapped or changed

The key outcomes needed from the workshop are usually:

- A **vision** of what the governing body wishes both its sport and itself to be like in the future
- A **mission statement** for the governing body designed to lead to the delivery of the vision
- The NGB’s **core values** or **principles** on which the plan will be based
- A small number (no more than 5 or 6, the fewer the better) of **broad goals** for the governing body, derived from the mission, each with a limited number of related measurable and time-related **objectives**
- Agreement on a limited number of **programme or functional areas** (again, no more than 5 or 6) to which the various aims and objectives can be linked. These programme or functional areas will probably set the future structure of the governing body.

The agenda for the workshop will depend upon the sport and its NGB, but is normally likely to include:

- Introductions - make sure everyone knows one another
- Analysis report - review to agree key conclusions and key issues the plan must tackle
- SWOT analysis for the NGB and its sport
- Determine the vision for the future
- Determine the NGB’s mission
- Identify desirable goals or outcomes, in order of priority
- Determine objectives to deliver the goals
- Identify programme areas

The workshop should be planned in such a way that all participants are encouraged by the facilitator to contribute and as a mixture of plenary and small group sessions.





The Vision

The ultimate purpose of a strategic plan is to deliver a desirable future. Accordingly it is essential to decide, right at the outset, what that desirable future will be. This is the vision of a successful NGB and its sport. It is most easily determined by imagining the NGB and its sport as highly successful in 4-5 years time and then answering nine key questions:

- Why will the sport be successful?
- What will “successful” mean?
- What will the NGB be doing?
- Who will be involved in the NGB?
- How will the NGB be operating?
- What would happen if the NGB disbanded?
- What will members and non-members think or say about the NGB?
- What will the NGB actually be achieving?
- What differences will the NGB be making to its sport?

If possible, the vision should be distilled down to one or at most two reasonably short sentences with which everyone at the workshop agrees. The shorter the vision, the better, because then workshop participants - and ultimately everyone involved in the NGB - will remember it. A long-winded vision is easily forgotten and therefore ignored. In addition it must be realistic but also inspire.

Some examples of NGB “visions” include:

- **Irish Sailing Association:** Making Irish sailing a world class organised sport
- **Scottish Hockey:** The leading team sport for the family

“Man is limited not so much by his tools as by his vision”

Richard Pascale and Anthony Anthos, The Art of Japanese Management





Mission

An organisation's mission statement sets out its fundamental purpose for existing - what it will do itself in order to deliver the vision it has set. Here are some examples:

- The Walt Disney Company: To make people happy
- Singapore Airlines: To offer the customer the best service that we are capable of providing; cut our costs to the bone; and generate a surplus to continue the unending process of renewal
- Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation: To contribute to the economic and social progress of Irish society by developing:
 - u A sustainable tourism sector which champions high standards in marketing, service quality and product development;
 - u An active culture in sport and recreation including the achievement of sporting excellence; and
 - u An enhanced partnership approach to local development with a particular emphasis on improving the quality of life of communities characterised by high levels of social deprivation
- Ulster Squash: To provide the leadership, co-ordination and services which will enable Ulster to become, and subsequently remain, the leading Province in Irish squash
- Scottish Table Tennis Association: to foster and promote organised table tennis in Scotland
- Irish Canoe Union: the Union is dedicated to the widespread development and promotion of canoeing as a competitive sport and as a recreational activity





The purpose of having a mission statement is to set out with absolute clarity what an organisation seeks to achieve. It can then be used to test proposals for any new programme or other initiative. If it will help to deliver the mission it can be pursued, subject to the availability of resources; if not, forget it. A mission statement should therefore be very powerful: not only should it set out what an organisation wants to achieve, but by implication it also identifies those things it will not do.

The key questions to consider when preparing a mission statement are usually:

- Why do we exist?
- What purpose do we aim to fulfil?
- Who are our primary targets?
- How do we intend to deliver our vision?

Like the vision, and for the same reason, short, simple mission statements are far better than long ones: Disney's four word approach is therefore close to ideal. A good rule of thumb is never to include more than one "and", other than in phrases like "sport and recreation". If a governing body can't set out its fundamental reason for existence in a single, tight sentence, either it doesn't really have a fundamental purpose or it's trying to do far too much. The more complex an organisation is, and the more diffuse its purpose, the more difficult it is to manage. In addition, its members and customers or clients will also find its purpose unclear. The mission of a shoe shop is to make a profit by selling shoes and as this is normally clear to customers they don't waste their own or assistants' time asking for books, flowers or whatever. A department store, comparatively speaking, is a management and customers' nightmare. This is one reason why many department stores have disappeared: they cannot compete effectively with tightly focused and more efficient speciality shops.





Core Values

We all believe in a number of core values or principles - the things we believe in - which guide the way we live our lives. Unfortunately not everyone believes in exactly the same things, which is of course one reason why we have political parties and arguments. The research leading to the production of Targeting Sporting Change in Ireland generated widespread agreement that the development of sport should encompass seven core principles:

- A people centred focus
- Equality
- Partnership
- Quality
- Accountability
- Volunteerism
- Sustainability

To these must be added an ethical approach to sport - condemnation of drug abuse or other forms of cheating and a concern to safeguard the welfare of children.

It is desirable for NGBs also to summarise their core values clearly as this will help to define the “organisational culture” within the NGB.

Key Goals and Objectives

There are likely to be a number of ways in which an NGB can set out to pursue its mission in order to achieve its vision. The workshop should try to identify a limited number of key goals which will do this - five or six are usually ample. With more than this, the NGB’s efforts and resources will have to be spread thinly and may achieve little. Goals do not have to be quantified but they must lead directly to the achievement of the vision and be compatible with the mission. The simplest way of identifying suitable goals is usually:

- Break the vision down into its constituent parts
- Decide what will have to be done to deliver each component of the vision; and
- Test each potential initiative or programme against the mission - is it our job to do this?





For example, the Irish Canoe Union's goals, derived from the mission quoted above, are:

- 1 More young people between 12-18 involved in recreational and competitive canoeing
- 2 Increased participation in recreational canoeing
- 3 Increased participation in competitive canoeing
- 4 Competing and winning at the highest international levels
- 5 Raising the skills level of individuals involved in canoeing; providing qualified personnel to instruct and coach canoeing
- 6 An increased number, variety and geographical spread of clubs
- 7 Maintenance and development of premier canoeing venues

Once goals like this are agreed, it should be possible to set out the action which will be needed to achieve them. For example, the Irish Canoe Union aims to achieve its goal of getting more young people aged 12-18 involved in recreational and competitive canoeing by:

- Facilitating the availability of a comprehensive range of youth-centred recreational and competitive canoeing programmes for implementation within youth agencies, schools and clubs
- Significantly increasing the number and availability of trained and qualified instructors and coaches through a restructuring of the Union's Training and Accreditation Scheme
- Establishing a twinning network of key personnel within schools and clubs interested in the development of youth canoeing; and by promoting initiatives between schools and clubs which create pathways to enable youths to become involved in club canoeing activities outside the school timetable
- Promoting and implementing a "Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children involved in Canoeing" as part of the Union's Accreditation Scheme





The Scottish Table Tennis Association's goals relating to more players involved in the game in Scotland are:

- Promote table tennis in schools
- Promote recreational play
- Improve the deployment of coaches
- Pilot a local development initiative
- Deliver further local development initiatives using the experience from the pilot scheme
- Foster effective regional associations

Programme Areas

Finally, if there is time, the workshop should seek to allocate the various objectives to a series of “programme areas”. These will ultimately determine the structure of the NGB. In some instances, specific objectives may relate to more than one functional area. Most NGBs will be able to identify a small number of programme areas such as:

- Finance
- Administration and member services
- Club/County/Provincial development and facilities
- Marketing and promotion
- Performance and high performance
- Coaches' and officials' development and deployment





Step 4: Synthesis

The outcomes from the planning workshop set the overall direction of the NGB for the future. However, the workshop will almost certainly not have had the time to decide all the tasks which will have to be undertaken, the resources which will be needed and who will be responsible for progressing each of them. This is done in Step 4, the Synthesis, the outcome of which will be the draft strategic plan.

Preparing the first draft of the plan is not a job for a committee: the result will be a camel rather than a horse. Instead, it is usually better to entrust the job to an individual who attended the planning workshop. It does not greatly matter whether that individual is a voluntary member of the NGB, a member of staff or an outside facilitator, provided they can:

- Take the results of the workshop and put them down on paper in a structured and balanced way
- Flesh out the various objectives agreed at the workshop into a series of “action plans” based on appropriate tasks

The way in which the plan is structured will significantly affect the way it is used and therefore its effectiveness. It should be based on a hierarchical approach of:

- The NGB’s vision and mission
- The NGB’s core values
- What the NGB wants to achieve - its goals
- The NGB’s specific objectives related to each of its goals
- An action plan for achieving each objective





4A: Mission, Vision, Core Values, Goals and Objectives

Immediately after the workshop, with apparent agreement on the overall future direction of the NGB and a head of steam behind its emerging plan, there is perhaps a danger of going too fast for the NGB's membership and other key stakeholders. The workshop participants may not in fact have been representative of the NGB's sport in general and some key stakeholders will not have had the chance to influence the overall direction of the NGB and its plan. Before doing too much work on the plan, therefore, it will be desirable to check that it is on the right lines by inviting affiliated Provincial or County associations, and other key internal or external stakeholders as appropriate, to comment on the proposed vision, mission, core values, goals and objectives. There are two key advantages to doing this before beginning to draft a detailed action plan:

- Key stakeholders will have the chance to comment on the plan at a time when it has clearly not yet been finalised, making them feel that they really do have a chance to influence it
- If changes are made, whoever is drafting the plan will not have done a lot of potentially abortive work

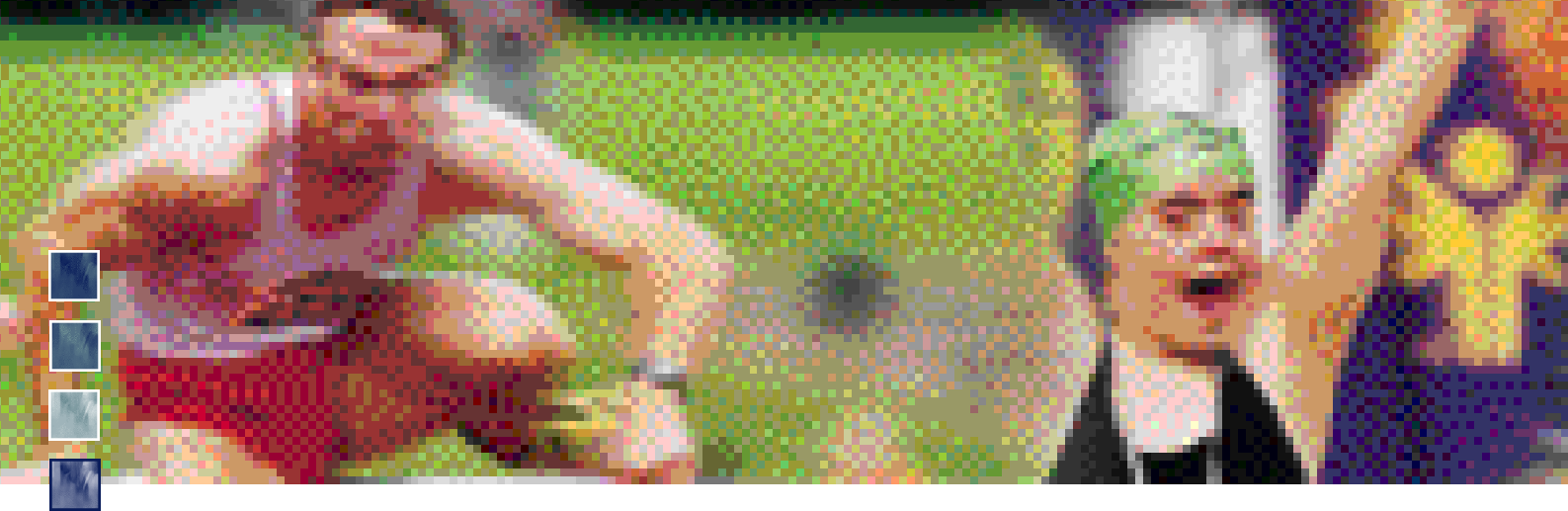
4B: The Draft Plan

Once responses have been received from key stakeholders, the Planning Team should either know that the plan is on the right lines or take account of the various comments made and amend the vision, mission, core values, goals and objectives as necessary. It can then get on with fleshing out the various objectives into an action plan.

There are various ways of setting out the appropriate actions to achieve a specific objective. What matters it that everything in the action plan should be SMART:

- **Simple** - so that everyone can understand it
- **Measurable** - because “what gets measured, gets done” and so the NGB can know whether a target has been achieved
- **Agreed** - by everyone involved in implementation
- **Realistic** - and therefore achievable with the resources and within the time available
- **Time-limited** - because setting a timescale and deadlines for something tends to lead to action





Begin with a table layout, with proposals for action listed under each objective. Suitable headings to use are:

- Proposed actions or tasks
- Starting point - the position at the start of the plan or year
- Performance indicators, or the measures the NGB will use to measure progress, related to each of the proposed actions or tasks. There may be more than one performance indicator for any task
- Clear, measurable and time-limited targets, setting out what is to be achieved in relation to each performance indicator in each year of the plan
- Who will be responsible for progressing each of the various tasks
- The resources to be used or required

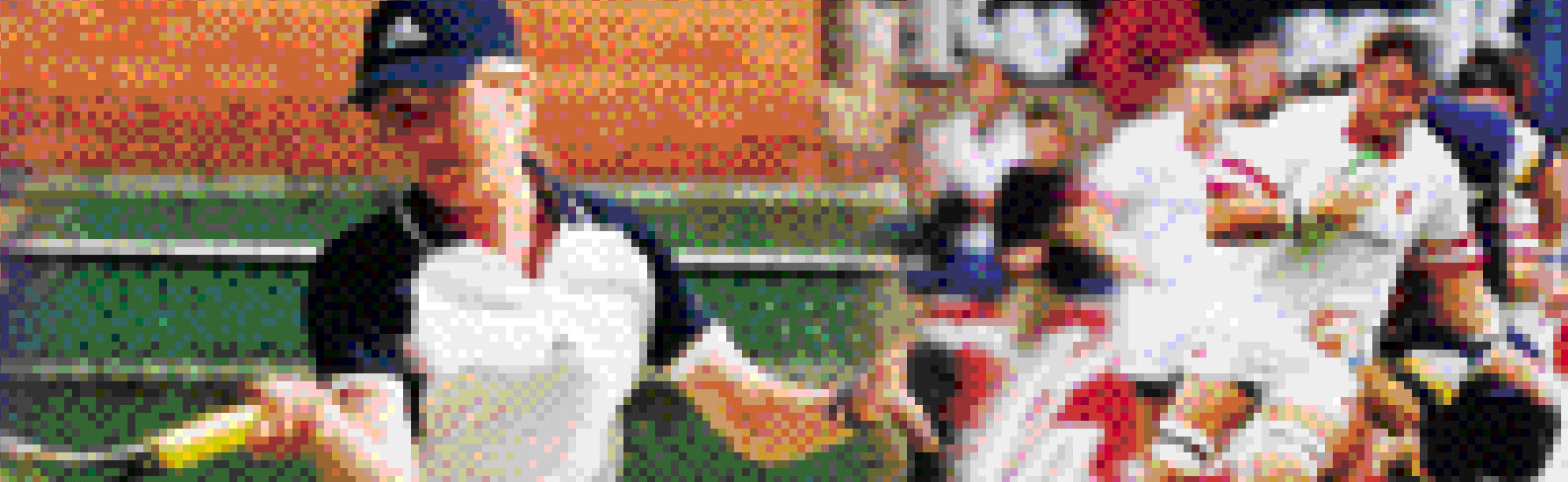
Once a first draft is available it should be reviewed by the Planning Team appointed in Step 1, although the membership of the team can of course be changed. This might happen if one or more members have resigned or the planning workshop has identified someone who is very keen to be involved.

The task of the Planning Team is to ensure the draft plan is comprehensive, balanced, realistic, achievable and likely to be acceptable to the NGB's membership. This may require several drafts, although by the time the third or fourth draft is in being any further changes should be very minor. It may also require specialist input to one or more sections of the plan; for example, NCTC personnel may be able to assist with the section on coaching development or player/athlete development. Alternatively, the NGB may need to set up one or more small short life working groups (with no more than 4 members) with a specific remit to oversee particular parts of the plan and then disband. However the revision of the plan is approached, everything in it must always be tested against the agreed mission.

“At a planning conference to examine all aspects of sailing in Ireland, it became apparent that the ISA had become unwieldy in terms of its ability to communicate effectively and respond quickly to major changes occurring in the sport and wider environment. This strategic plan identifies the need for the ISA to streamline its structures to maximise the input of volunteers and the expertise which exists within the sport.”

*Irish Sailing Association,
Strategic Plan 1999-2003*





Once the plan is broadly agreed by the Planning Team, it should consider the NGB's overall structure and constitution. They must be designed to deliver the plan in the future rather than based on how the NGB has been structured or operated in the past. NGBs are often far too democratic, with too many meetings of too large committees to be effective.

Changing the structure of an NGB is usually fraught with difficulty. Almost inevitably some long-serving officials will not want their role to be changed or diminished, while the individual who had ambitions to be the next chair of a particular committee will not want that committee abolished. These vested interests and personal ambitions must be overcome. The key areas which most NGBs will have to review are:

- Their legal structure: while most NGBs are currently voluntary bodies with a constitution, there may be advantages to be gained from incorporation as a company in order to give additional protection to office-bearers and members. However, any NGB considering incorporation should obtain legal advice.
- Their membership structure - the way in which individuals, clubs, leagues, counties or provinces affiliate to the NGB and the relationship between them
- Their membership subscriptions or other fees
- Their need for, role and level of professional staff and how they will relate to volunteers
- Their committee and decision-making structures
- Their office-bearers' roles and responsibilities
- Their budgeting and financial control procedures





Step 5: Consultation and Adoption

A strategic plan which no-one knows about will never be a success. A key part of the strategic planning process is to foster “shared ownership” of the plan by all parts of the NGB and key stakeholders. It is clearly impossible for every member of the NGB and potential stakeholder to be involved in the work of producing the plan, but they should have the opportunity to respond and comment when it is still in draft. There must therefore be a consultation phase before the plan is adopted by the NGB. This can also pave the way for an AGM or Special General Meeting at which the plan will formally be adopted, together with any structural changes which may be needed.

The first, informal consultation should be with the Irish Sports Council, for the simple reason that effective implementation of the plan will almost certainly depend on its support. There is no point in going to the membership with a plan which cannot be delivered because the Irish Sports Council cannot support it as the NGB had not taken appropriate account of the Council’s policies during the preparation of its plan. NCTC should also be consulted during the drafting and planning process especially when seeking input on coach education and provision for elite performers in the sport.

Thereafter, it will be vitally important to consult the membership and other key stakeholders. As the full draft plan is likely to be a fairly lengthy document, circulating a copy to every member and stakeholder could be expensive, particularly as some will not read it. A better approach might be to prepare a short summary of no more than say 4 pages, setting out the vision, mission, broad goals and related objectives and an outline of the proposed action plan together with any proposed structural changes to the NGB. It will then be desirable to provide the opportunity for members to comment on the plan, for example through a series of Provincial roadshows.

Finally, the plan should be formally adopted by the NGB at its AGM or a Special General Meeting called for the purpose. This is a vital component of promoting wide ownership of the plan and it also gives a clear mandate to those who will be responsible for implementing it.

“In order to maximise the return on the time and input of the volunteers whose contribution to the sport is essential and to increase the efficiency of the organisation structure it is proposed to reshape it with a reduction in the number of standing committees. A Board of Directors will take control of the running of the Association and each of the Directors will take personal responsibility for a strategic operational area.”

*Irish Sailing Association,
Strategic Plan 1999-2003*



Step 6: Implementation

If the plan is not implemented much of the time and effort spent preparing it will have been wasted. Moreover, non-implementation may have implications for grant aid to the NGB from the Irish Sports Council in future years, if agreement was reached on investment based on the plan. For obvious reasons, it will usually be sensible to begin implementation of the plan at the start of a financial year.

Implementation is best organised through annual action plans, prepared and budgeted in advance for each financial year. This then raises the issue of who should draw up these action plans each year and how they should be implemented.

Most NGB activity in the past has depended upon individuals being willing to spend long hours attending committee meetings. Having too many people involved can be counter-productive as it slows down decision-making: for example, the Irish Sailing Association's Strategic Plan 1999-2003 notes that its former structure involved over 140 volunteers on various committees. No doubt many of them would much rather have been out on the water. The Royal Irish Automobile Club's strategic plan for motor sport states that the major factor hampering the progress of Irish motor sport is the way in which its various committees work in isolation.

At the same time, many NGB's are finding it more and more difficult to attract volunteers willing to be involved in their administration. Fortunately, the greater the clarity there is in the strategic plan relating to the various tasks the NGB wishes to progress, the less there is a need for large committees. Indeed, if an NGB has a comprehensive strategic plan it should be able to be effective with only a few, fairly small committees or short life working groups. As a general rule, there should be as few standing committees as possible, with specific tasks delegated, if necessary, to small short life working groups with a tightly defined remit. It is also more than likely that the strategic planning process will help to bring new people into the heart of the NGB as they come to know more about it and realise what it intends to do.





An alternative to standing committees which many NGBs should consider is to appoint “Programme Directors” - individuals who will be responsible for progressing specific programme areas identified within the strategic plan. In large NGBs these Programme Directors may be paid members of staff; in medium sized NGBs one or two may be; and in small NGBs they may all be volunteers. Each Programme Director may, if he or she wishes, have a committee. A more effective approach, however, may be to form one or more short life working groups for specific tasks; with the Programme Directors retaining responsibility, as individuals, for the progression of their part of the strategic plan and reporting to the NGB’s AGM on the progress achieved.

Programme Directors may be elected or appointed. Traditionally, NGBs have elected almost all of their voluntary officials but this does not mean they should necessarily continue to do so. Moving to a system of appointments allows senior office-bearers (possibly aided and advised by specialist advisers from the NCTC or Irish Sports Council) to draw up a job specification, seek applications and appoint the best person for the job for a 2-3 years term, subject of course to satisfactory performance. This helps to emphasise that Programme Directors are appointed to do a defined job and not simply hold a voluntary position. If necessary the NGB should be willing to pay for training for its Programme Directors - a small price to pay for getting a job done effectively.

The initial action plan will have been produced during the overall planning process. Subsequent action plans and related budgets should be produced by the office bearers and Programme Directors and discussed with the Irish Sports Council annually. This will allow each of the Programme Directors to influence their future work programme, while also allowing elected office-bearers to play a wide-ranging supportive and supervisory role similar to that of non-executive directors in a company. The “Board of Management” or “Executive Committee” will normally be the elected office-bearers and Programme Directors, although any NGB with a chief executive or other senior member of staff may also wish to include him or her.





“Managers have to learn to make mistakes faster”

Tom Peters, Thriving on Chaos

Possibly the key aspect of implementation is the control of money. It is therefore vital to design budgeting and accounting systems which will ease implementation. The existence of the strategic plan and related action plans should make it possible for budgets to be delegated to Programme Directors who are then able to get on with their job, provided they stay within their overall budget. There is no reason in principle why Programme Directors should not be authorised to incur expenditure up to some pre-determined limit without reference to anyone else. However, for obvious reasons, all income and expenditure should go through one or more bank accounts overseen independently by a Treasurer or Director of Finance.

Finally, involving the NGB's members in approving the strategic plan should mean that they will want to be kept informed of progress and approve the broad thrust of each annual action plan. Accordingly each Programme Director should present a formal report to the AGM each year setting out:

- A reminder of the plan's mission, goals and objectives
- A summary of the action plan approved at the previous AGM for his or her programme area
- A summary of the progress achieved in implementing the action plan, with an explanation of any changes made during the year
- A review of overall progress with implementation of their area(s) of the strategic plan to date
- Proposals for the next year's action plan





Step 7: Review

A comprehensive and inclusive planning process should result in a vision, mission and broad aims which will remain valid and guide the work of the governing body for at least 3-4 years. A period of at least this length is required in order to allow the plan and those implementing it time to be effective.

However, this does not mean that it should be set in tablets of stone. The NGB should be able to learn from its successes and failures in implementing the plan as it goes along. All strategic plans should therefore be subject to two forms of review:

- An annual “health check” to review progress, fine tune the plan and determine the action plan and budgets for the year ahead. The annual check-up will also be informed by meetings with ISC and other key stakeholders, such as NCTC, commercial partners, etc.
- A complete review from first principles approximately every 4 years. The actual period will depend on the effectiveness of the plan and relate also to appropriate planning cycles for the NGB: Olympic sports, for example, should clearly work to a four-year cycle.





Notes





Notes

