

# ACTIVATING YOUR PLAN

If you've worked hard to build a great plan but it's sitting on a shelf, gathering dust: you're not alone! One of the most challenging stages of strategic planning is getting going. This guide will provide some troubleshooting tips on how to overcome common obstacles, or how to set yourself up for success if you're just starting out.

## ***"WE HAVE COMPLETED AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN, BUT IT'S VERY LONG WITH MANY OPTIONS AND WE DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START."***

Crucial to move from vision and strategic areas to specific action in order to get the plan off the ground. Many communities find themselves in the position of having developed a plan that exceeds their abilities to implement it, and it's hard to know where to start or what to prioritize. Some or all of the following steps may help to get you going:

- Grant matching: see what grant resources are out there and which actions in your plan meet the grant criteria. See if there are specific grant programs that focus on specific elements, or have a time-limited duration. Focus some of your initial efforts on those which satisfy these criteria. You will find that grant applications also become easier to complete when you have a strategic plan to link it back to.
- Capacity matching: shop the plan around and see what actions in the plan can be moved on by staff, community groups or enthusiastic individuals (i.e. those "grey dragons" – retired folks that have interest and experience and would like to participate, they just need some direction).
- Prioritize: re-group with key stakeholders for a session to focus on the strategic area and activity prioritization steps.
- Condense the strategy into a [Plan-On-A-Page](#): this exercise is often very helpful to evaluate and visually pull out what's most important.
- Organize your vision: use the [Implementation Plan Template](#) to clearly lay out who is doing what and when.

## ***"WE HAVE A PLAN BUT WE CAN'T GET ANY TRACTION WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO MAKE IT HAPPEN."***

One of the most common reasons plans fail is that they did not adequately integrate the feedback and perspective of key stakeholders into the process. Getting early buy-ins allows for barriers to be removed and critical resources to be mobilized. Trying to sell the plan to those who did not contribute may be challenging, but taking some specific steps to overcome this resistance may help considerably. Options include:

- Identify "quick starts" – actions that are simple to do, visible and have broad support to re-energize the process and get momentum going.
- Target two or three key stakeholders to plan and implement one or more of the quick-start options to boost buy-in in process.
- Frame initial actions as a "pilot" to see how it works for stakeholders. Consult with them during and after, and assure them that the focus of the remainder of the plan is flexible and will be based on their feedback.
- Circle back to stakeholders and hold a session to re-imagine the plan before getting started.



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## ***“WE HAVE A GREAT PLAN, WE HAD STRONG OUTSIDE EXPERTISE PUTTING IT TOGETHER, BUT WE’RE NOT CLEAR ON HOW TO PROCEED (OR IT WENT NOWHERE).”***

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It is not uncommon for communities to stall after the strategic planning process. It may be due to limited capacity and resources, or it may be that there is no one who has taken the lead on acting on the identified strategies.

- Again, identify “quick starts”: actions that are simple to do, visible and have broad support to re-energize the process and get momentum going.
- Get committed champions: before wrapping up the process, get some committed individuals or organizations to take on some actions.
- Do action planning: develop detailed action plans with key stakeholders that identify clear tasks, lead and support individuals, resources and timelines.
- Work with an advisory committee: gather on a regular basis, formally or informally, with key stakeholders and political leadership to keep the plan alive.
- Build in initial “surge” funding or projects to give your plan a quick boost and get it off the ground with a project of significance, with involvement of multiple stakeholders to encourage buy-in in the process.

## ***“WE DON’T HAVE FUNDS TO UNDERTAKE SOME OR ALL OF OUR DESIRED ACTIONS.”***

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Many communities do not have the financial resources required to get some desired projects off the ground. Be sure to:

- Familiarize yourself with the funding opportunities that may be suited to your specific context. Use the [Funding and Grants Search Tool](#) to identify what programs may fit your situation.
- Establish partnerships with local businesses and organizations to co-deliver projects. Often, this will put you in a better position to qualify for grants as well, when partnered projects receive more money (such as [BC Rural Dividend](#)).
- Brainstorm creative solutions to provide a kick-back to the community economic development function, such as buy-local events or gift card sales where a portion of the proceeds go back to economic development.

## ***“WE CAN’T AGREE ON WHICH ACTIVITIES TO MOVE FORWARD WITH FIRST.”***

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Sometimes, the key players in the process can’t agree how to move forward. We suggest returning to [Visioning](#) and [Strategic Area Goals](#) to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Use some or all of the suggested methods in [Prioritizing Activities](#), and decide in advance if a certain person or group will have the final say. Also be sure to consult widely with stakeholders and spend some time on [About Us: Key Info And Asset Inventory](#) and [Strategic Assessment](#) – these activities often help to shed more light on the types of efforts that are most needed and will yield the most immediate results. If internal disagreement persists, try opening consultation up to town halls or online polls to break the stalemate.



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## ***“WE HAVE A LOT OF POLITICAL AND STAFFING TURNOVER OR ISSUES WITH CONSISTENCY IN KEY PLAYERS.”***

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The benefit of having clear strategic plan is that it is an enduring document that can be live on when key staff leave. To foster consistency:

- Have an approved plan: the plan should be clearly written and approved by appropriate council(s) or board(s).
- Committees: it should not be just one person’s pet project. Multi-stakeholder oversight committees with ties to political leadership or boards can provide bridge capacity when there is staff or political turnover.
- Record keeping: as the plan unfolds, keep minutes or record of key decisions in the process so that new individuals (staff or political) can understand the factors that led to particular decisions.
- Partnerships are key: active networks and partnerships with the business community, local chambers, community organizations and industry keep the planning active and responsive to changing business environments.

## ***“WE HAVE ACTION ITEM(S) THAT WE DON’T KNOW HOW TO GET STARTED ON.”***

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There are several options for support and guidance for local economic development. These include:

- [B.C.’s Economic Development Portal](#), which contains a number of resources, tools, recorded webinars, grants and funding look-up and contact information.
- Each region in B.C. has a regional economic development manager, who can provide one-on-one support and guidance. If you’re not sure who your regional manager is, send a message to [economicdevelopment@gov.bc.ca](mailto:economicdevelopment@gov.bc.ca)
- The [BC Economic Development Association \(BCEDA\)](#) is the professional association of economic development practitioners in B.C., and provides support services, professional development opportunities and other resources.
- The [Union of BC Municipalities \(UBCM\)](#) has a Community Economic Development committee that periodically produces research and advice to its members. The [Local Government Management Association \(LGMA\)](#) offers programs, workshops and webinars that may fit your needs.

## ***“WE’RE CONSTANTLY BEING ASKED TO DEMONSTRATE WHY THESE ACTIVITIES ARE VALUABLE.”***

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Establishing monitoring, measurement and evaluation plans are an often overlooked but key success factor for initiatives of all kinds. By establishing a regular reporting and measurement schedule, you are empowered to represent your activities and their progress in a way that makes sense and relates directly back to the established goals. We recommend working through [Evaluation](#) and the [Performance Measurement Toolkit](#) to understand how to make measurement, reporting and evaluation a valuable (and not painful!) part of your process.

