

# Strategic Planning

for Effective Electoral Management



A Practical Guide for  
Election Management Bodies to  
Conduct a Strategic Planning Exercise

Antonio Spinelli





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International Foundation for Electoral Systems



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**Antonio Spinelli**

October 2011



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# Acknowledgements

IFES wishes to express particular appreciation to a number of individuals who contributed their expertise, experience, thoughts and input to the development of the second edition of IFES' Guide on *Strategic Planning for Effective Electoral Management*.

First, profound appreciation must be expressed for the life work and memory of Joe C. Baxter, the author of the original version of the guide. Without his talents, sustained dedication and visionary and distinctive approach to electoral management, this publication would have been impossible. Joe's numerous electoral assistance efforts around the world influenced the work of many people who had the privilege of knowing him and learning from him. In a number of ways, Joe managed to change the face of what electoral assistance is today and what it will continue to be in the future.

As a Senior Electoral Advisor for IFES, long-time friend of Joe Baxter and lead writer, Antonio Spinelli conceptualized and developed the new structure and expanded contents of the Guide's second edition. Building on the solid base of the original edition, this task entailed extensive research on existing strategic planning methodologies and models, and adapting them to the cyclical process and elements of electoral planning and management.

Riccardo Villani, co-writer, is an experienced strategic planning expert. It was in this capacity that he contributed to the design, application and adaptation of the latest strategic planning methodologies for electoral management. His experience in planning and management methodologies focused on making production efficient and competitive in the business sector, was the determinant element that put "wings" on this publication. It helped turn the document into a cutting-edge tool for proactive thinking and strategic action in the management of elections.

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IFES expresses gratitude to all of the election management bodies around the world who strive to achieve operational excellence while constantly being challenged by their ever-changing environments. For them, IFES hopes this Guide will represent a useful tool to address the multiple challenges they confront, regardless of region or political context.

Finally, IFES welcomes any feedback on this Guide in order to continue improving the publication and methodology proposed, as well as to assist electoral management bodies in their strategic planning implementation efforts.

# About

## The Author

Antonio Spinelli currently serves as IFES Chief of Party for Egypt. Drawing on nearly two decades of experience in electoral assistance and administration, he has conducted extensive advisory, managerial, operational, programmatic and analytical work in a wide variety of electoral-related programs around the world. In particular, his work has focused on the conceptualization, development and provision of long-term capacity development and institutional strengthening to national electoral institutions, primarily in transitional democratic settings and in conflict and post-conflict environments.

Spinelli has provided his expertise to IFES since 1998, most recently working as a Senior Referendum Advisor and Election Administration Expert in Sudan. Previously, he worked as an IFES Election Specialist in Indonesia, an Electoral Expert in Kosovo, Chief of Party in Yemen and Georgia and as Senior Electoral Advisor in South Africa.

Prior to joining IFES in Egypt, Spinelli served as a Transitional Governance Specialist for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Nepal and as Senior Program Officer for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) in Sweden. Earlier, as Chief Technical Advisor for UNDP, he managed a large-scale electoral support project in Yemen.

In addition, Spinelli has also participated in UN peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, Mozambique and Eastern Slavonia (Croatia). He has been involved in numerous election supervision, observation and assessment missions for the United Nations, the European Commission, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has also worked in a wide number of countries, including: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bosnia Herzegovina, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, the Maldives, Mexico, Montenegro, the Palestinian West Bank Territories, Sierra Leone and South Africa. He has also worked as a Country Representative for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) supervising the organization and conduct of the 1996 out-of-country municipal elections for the Bosnian refugees living in Italy.



## IFES

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) is the global leader in election assistance and democracy promotion.

IFES promotes democratic stability by providing technical assistance and applying field-based research to the electoral cycle worldwide to enhance citizen participation and strengthen civil societies, governance and transparency.

Every project is staffed by national and international staff while partnering with local organizations. In this way, IFES is able to offer its partners a range of options based on over two decades of electoral experience. This homegrown approach ensures that the expertise offered by IFES fits the needs of the country and the benefit of assistance outlasts the life of the project.

IFES' work is nonpartisan and includes projects beyond electoral work. Critical components of IFES programs include supporting and developing strong parliaments, mature political parties, an effective opposition, the rule of law, active civil society and a free media.

Since its founding in 1987, IFES has worked in 135 countries, from developing democracies to mature democracies.

# Foreword

The past two decades have seen a global, unprecedented increase in the number of countries conducting competitive elections. While a few notable exceptions to this trend still exist, most of the world's states currently hold valuable forms of multiparty elections. As a result, millions of individuals around the world regularly and freely exercise their right to vote as the expression of their active role and participation in a democratic society.

Not all voters, however, while casting their ballot, reflect on the measures needed and implemented to allow that ballot paper to be marked, cast and counted. In fact, as the end-user of a lengthy technical and political process that is not entirely visible, not every voter can thoroughly appreciate the magnitude and complexity of the planning, procedural, administrative and operational efforts conducted by hundreds of electoral officials, around the clock, for months proceeding Election Day.

In contrast, an election from the perspective of an electoral administrator is an entirely different issue. An electoral administrator is constantly aware that organizing and delivering an election is an extensive, multi-faceted and complex endeavor that, to be successful, has to heavily rely on effective planning and management techniques.

Therefore, effective planning is at the heart of the successful delivery of every election. It represents one of the most fundamental elements that the legally mandated institution, the electoral management body (EMB), needs for effective functioning and integrity of an election.

An effective planning process ensures that all electoral operations take place successfully, in a timely manner and are conducted in compliance with regulations. Electoral materials must have the right specifications, be in the right place, in the right quantity and at the right time. Electoral officials must be properly trained and fully aware of their functions and duties. All candidates must be registered according to existing legal provisions and timelines. It is through the effective management of all these processes and procedures that voters on Election Day are allowed to exercise their right to vote without legal, administrative, logistical or security impediments of any kind.

Recognizing the crucial importance of effective planning in the management of elections, over the past two decades IFES has provided sustained support to EMBs across the globe in their efforts to strengthen themselves, institutionally, and to improve their performance. IFES encourages the adaptation and application of innovative strategic planning methodologies to the administration of the elections these bodies are legally mandated to deliver.

More than 10 years have passed since IFES produced and launched the first edition *Guide on Strategic Planning for Election Organisations* in 1999. Although this tool continues to remain both innovative and useful, over the past decade the world of

elections has continued to evolve. The second edition, *Strategic Planning for Effective Electoral Management*, is an updated and enhanced version of the original guide to reflect the evolving needs in electoral administration and key lessons learned by IFES in implementing strategic planning initiatives across the world.

IFES confirms its commitment to support EMBs across the world to effectively address the key challenges they confront election after election. In this second edition, the Guide sets out a systematic framework and a methodology that can assist EMBs to maximize the efficiency of their planning systems and efficiently use often limited resources. By strengthening themselves as modern, functional and reputable institutions, these EMBs will ultimately improve the credibility of the elections they administer, with results that endure from one cycle of elections to the next.

***Michael Svetlik, IFES Vice President of Programs***

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*If you do not know  
to what port you  
are steering, no  
wind is favorable  
to you.*

*Seneca*

# Preface

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The concepts and methodologies of strategic planning have been known for several decades. However, an understanding of their applicability to electoral management, and specifically, to an electoral management body<sup>1</sup> (EMB) and its work, is relatively recent. Today, more and more EMBs recognize the importance and benefits of effectively managing their mandated functions, and the resulting increase in quality and credibility of the elections they are entrusted to deliver. Consequently, the need and demand for practical and strategic planning tools and innovative methodological approaches have considerably increased, becoming a high priority for many EMBs all over the world.

More than a decade has passed since IFES began conducting targeted initiatives focusing on the adaptation and application of strategic planning methodologies to the practice of electoral management. This updated Strategic Planning Guide allows IFES to continue providing a practical reference tool to assist EMBs that are willing to embrace strategic planning to shape and guide their institutional improvement efforts and strengthen their planning and management functions.

The Guide is the result of extensive efforts in research, analysis, categorization and comparison. It looks at a wide range of strategic planning methodologies employed by different organizations in diverse specialties. The findings of this effort have helped define the strategic planning methodology outlined in this publication.

The proposed methodology leads the EMB through key steps in the implementation of a strategic planning process, what key decisions must be made and when, and what actions should be undertaken and in what sequence, to attain a meaningful and successful outcome at the end of a strategic planning cycle. Through the use of this Guide, strategic planning is no longer just a one-off activity to be run once within the EMB. Rather, it becomes a part of the EMB's institutional culture; which guides and shapes the way the EMB plans, manages and fulfills its day-to-day operations while moving toward the achievement of its long-term vision.

Hence, through its practical approach and structured methodology, the Guide helps familiarize the EMB with the concept of using strategic planning as a management tool to enhance the performance of its mandated functions, and put this tool into practical, effective use.

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<sup>1</sup> An electoral management body is an organization or a body established for the purpose of, and legally responsible for, managing one or more of the elements that are essential for the conduct of elections. EMBs have a variety of names, shapes and sizes, including: Election Commission, Department of Elections, Electoral Council, Election Unit or Electoral Board. The term electoral management body or EMB has been coined to refer to the body or bodies responsible for electoral management whatever wider institutional framework is in place. This definition has been adapted from the ACE Encyclopedia: [www.aceproject.org](http://www.aceproject.org).

The new Guide has been designed to influence numerous aspects of the EMB's institutional, administrative, management and operational settings. These include:

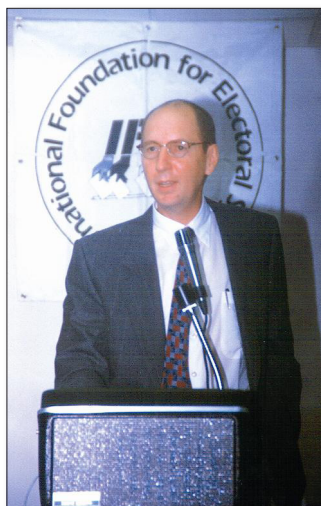
- Determining the EMB's long-ranging strategic direction as an organization
- Shaping and focusing the EMB's actions to fulfill this direction
- Regularly assessing and adjusting its operational and institutional direction in response to a changing environment

IFES' Guide takes the EMB through a structured, long-ranging strategic planning process to reach fundamental decisions and implement key strategic actions to help determine the essence of what the EMB is, what it does and why it does it.

The process outlined in the Guide is structured by a sequential order of actions, consisting of consecutive steps and milestones that assist the EMB in keeping the implementation of the process timely, orderly, focused and results-oriented. The steps of this methodology take the EMB through a process of internal and external examination to determine where the EMB is currently; where it desires to be in the future; and to autonomously define how the EMB will get there on a long-range horizon (normally from 3 to 5 years).

Furthermore, the methodology offered by IFES' Guide allows the EMB to be strategic because it provides its prospective users with the ability to adapt and proactively respond

Figure 1: Joe C. Baxter

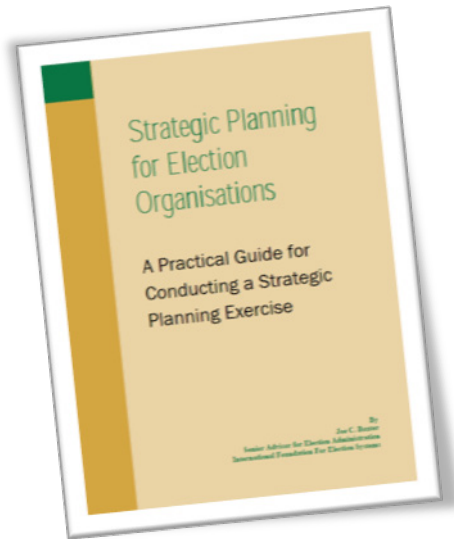


to the numerous challenges of a dynamic environment in which the EMB normally operates. By becoming strategic, the EMB can determine its objectives with more clarity and more efficiently allocate available resources to meet them.

Finally, the process outlined by the Guide also focuses on planning. Planning assists the EMB in defining its strategic goals, based on a desired future, and developing a long-range strategic plan on how to most effectively achieve those goals.

Some EMBs are new to strategic planning and are just now applying this methodology for the first time. Others have used it for years, and strategic planning has become their modus operandi. This Guide has been designed so that it may be of assistance to EMBs new to strategic planning and to those familiar with this methodology. For those who are new, this Guide offers a systematic and consistent methodology in the implementation of a strategic planning

Figure 2: First Version of Planning Guide



process. For those who are familiar with strategic planning, this Guide provides a process to review, update and enhance existing long-term strategic plans.

## BACKGROUND OF THE GUIDE

This Guide is the second edition of *Strategic Planning for Election Organisations: a Practical Guide for Conducting a Strategic Planning Exercise*, originally conceived and developed in 1999 by Joe C. Baxter,<sup>2</sup> IFES' then-Senior Electoral Advisor (Fig. 1). With its innovative concepts, methodology and approach, the first Guide (Fig. 2) marked a significant transition in the global provision of electoral assistance and planning and managing electoral processes.

Achieving this transition required a renewed focus on the following areas:

<sup>2</sup> More information about Joe C. Baxter and his work can be found on the ACE Project website by visiting <http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/about/dedication>.

**A locally-owned and self-driven institutional strengthening process.** Joe Baxter's vision was built on the principle that democracy has to be locally owned and driven to be meaningful, sustainable and effective. He believed electoral support cannot be imposed from the outside.

Since an EMB must be strengthened from within, any form of technical support should be provided with an understanding of the particular context in which the EMB operates. Joe understood that international electoral assistance was about more than simply providing external support to EMBs focused on a single election event. He believed in the importance of building strong and sustainable local capacity to ensure an enduring and positive impact of any assistance effort.

Baxter began developing the first edition of the Guide and its methodology by placing a strong emphasis on the necessity for ensuring a real sense of ownership by the EMB staff who would ultimately plan, organize and engage in the strategic planning process. He saw local ownership as a primary requirement for guaranteeing that the strategic planning exercise and the resulting written plan would be suitable, relevant and customized to their specific context.

One of the main innovations of the Guide, therefore, was its groundbreaking approach to electoral assistance: the Guide placed unprecedented importance on the key principles of local ownership and self-determination. Rather than focusing on the role of an external assistance provider, it focused more on the leading role to be played by the EMB in implementing a strategic plan and determining its own institutional strengthening priorities.



**Process-driven electoral management.**

For the first time, the Guide moved the focus from an electoral event per se and placed it on the actual electoral process, as a whole. The Guide shifted the focus of electoral management from being event-driven (with all efforts exclusively geared towards Election Day) to being process-driven. It focused more on addressing the multiple and intertwined aspects comprising the electoral process holistically, and in the longterm.

Baxter realized that many EMBs focus their operations, efforts and funds entirely towards the electoral event (Election Day). Their work was often accomplished in a compressed period of time and with little or no regard to the aftermath of the election. This short-lived approach proved, in most cases, to be both inefficient in terms of financial costs and ephemeral in terms of achieving an impact that could endure for following cycles of elections.

Through its planning, assessment and management methodologies, Baxter's Guide aimed at addressing all interlocked tasks and components which comprise an electoral cycle.

**A proactive approach to planning.** The third innovation was the concept of proactive planning in the management of electoral processes by the EMB.

Baxter realized the most significant challenges faced by EMBs were the result of their reactive approach to planning. Performing mandated functions with limited or inadequate planning abilities caused problems and constraints to arise unexpectedly, requiring the EMB to resort

to hurried and last-minute solutions. These solutions were then applied as a reaction to unanticipated, already occurring problems. By the time a problem occurs, it may be too late to solve it in an efficient, transparent, cost-effective and permanent manner.

The Guide, therefore, focused on the advantages of a “proactive” approach to planning. This approach is of paramount importance for the EMB. To most effectively deal with various management complexities that impact the delivery of a credible election, the EMB must anticipate the needs and priorities that it is going to face. In promoting the concept of planning significantly ahead of the actual event, the Guide enabled the EMB to proactively account for possible changes and potential problems before they occur. Identifying possible issues enables the EMB to put appropriate pre-emptive measures in place.

IFES, aware of the value and the significant potential that Joe Baxter's Guide has offered EMBs, continued to invest resources in promoting this important tool, while using and adapting its flexible methodology. Today, the application of strategic planning to electoral administration and management remains an exclusive niche and distinctive form of electoral support provided by IFES across the globe.

Additional recognition of the validity and innovative nature of the Guide's methodology is evident from its inclusion into the BRIDGE<sup>3</sup> training curriculum. The Guide formed the

<sup>3</sup> BRIDGE stands for “Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections” and is a modular professional development program with a particular focus on electoral processes. More information can be found at [www.bridge-project.org](http://www.bridge-project.org).

basis of the “Strategic Planning” Module under the framework of the BRIDGE Partnership.<sup>4</sup>

With all these important achievements, it is essential to acknowledge that the second edition of IFES Strategic Planning Guide represents an important recognition of Joe Baxter and the continuation of his work, legacy and vision.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENT OF THE GUIDE

IFES’ *Strategic Planning for Effective Electoral Management Guide* is structured in six chapters, as follows:

### Chapter 1: Introduction

The Introduction begins by describing the challenging environment of continuous change and evolving needs faced by many EMBs in countries experiencing dramatic political transformation of democratic systems over the last two decades.

Starting with a definition of what a credible election entails for an EMB, this chapter continues with a description and an analysis of the diverse aspects (logistical, administrative, financial, legal, operational) of the process of planning, organizing and delivering an election. The analysis then leads to identification of inadequate and reactive planning as one of the main causes for organizational and management deficiencies that affect an EMB’s functioning at multiple levels.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to IFES, the other BRIDGE Partners are: the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD).

The chapter highlights important distinctions between reactive and proactive planning. It explains how effective and long-time planning helps EMBs to anticipate complexities they may confront and how to maximize their chances of delivering a successful and credible election.

Finally, this chapter concludes by providing a description of the benefits of adopting a proactive planning strategy and how the strategic planning methodology, proposed by the Guide, can be used as a multi-purpose tool in the work of the EMB.

### Chapter 2: Strategic Planning for Effective Electoral Management

This chapter introduces the reader to the definition of the main strategic planning concepts and their application to electoral management. It provides a detailed definition of what strategic planning is and, importantly, what it is not.

A description of its main benefits; why it is essential to engage key stakeholders; and suitable timing for conducting this exercise follows.

Importantly, this chapter introduces the “Strategic Planning Cycle,” which envisions the implementation of a strategic planning effort as a cyclical and revolving process. Each step in the process has a well-defined start and finish. An overview of the steps in the full Strategic Planning Cycle and a schematic representation of key requirements are presented.

Chapter 2 concludes with a description and assessment of potential risks that could be encountered when implementing a strategic planning process. It also explains how these risks could be managed.

### **Chapter 3: Implementing the Strategic Planning Cycle**

This is the core chapter of the Guide. This chapter illustrates, in detail, all the steps of the proposed methodology and to be followed by EMBs in their multi-year strategic planning exercise. The methodology consists of eight sequential steps (from Step 0 to Step 7).

This chapter of the Guide also provides a thorough explanation of how to conduct the full Strategic Planning Cycle through its various steps, from beginning to completion.

### **Chapter 4: Samples**

Chapter 4 presents real samples of strategic planning elements already developed by EMBs across the world for comparative purposes and inspiration.

### **Chapter 5: Glossary of Terms**

The Glossary provides definitions of strategic planning terms used in this Guide.

### **Chapter 6: Annexes**

This section contains additional samples, operational tools and sources of information.

*Planning is bringing the future into the present, so that you can do something about it now.*

*Alan Lakein*

# Introduction

## **A RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT**

By nature, electoral management is a practice in a continuous state of change. Today, electoral management bodies (EMBs) confront a wide range of challenges that were not present only a few years ago, while fulfilling their mandated functions as institutions of democratic governance.

If we take a step back and look at the practice of holding an election as it was implemented merely two decades ago, we could see how, in the vast majority of cases, elections were primarily considered to be an internal affair of every sovereign state. Each country conducted this practice on its own, almost in isolation. At that time, neither the management of the electoral process, nor the legitimacy of the outcome this process produced was subject to any technical assessment or to any type of external scrutiny and political validation.

That situation changed with the end of the Cold War and the historic spread of democracy that followed it. The inevitable crumbling of authoritarian regimes and their long consolidated political systems prompted the expansion of important civil and political freedoms on a global scale. For the first time, electoral processes were required to meet new and broader democratic standards and principles.

In this rapidly changing environment, periodic, competitive elections became a critical means to validate and legitimize these changes. Gradually, electoral processes assumed a growing importance in democratic governance, attracting more and more international visibility. As a result, both long-established and emerging democracies found themselves under pressure to respond to the needs of this rapidly evolving political environment.

Electoral systems had to comply with internationally recognized standards that, until then, had been unknown, unheard of or openly neglected. Fundamental, democratic principles considered by authoritarian and oppressive regimes to be merely negligible commitments, or desirable but not necessary aspirations, became unavoidable obligations for any state wishing to be considered a legitimate democracy. For the first time, to be a democracy meant a state had to legitimately and realistically empower its citizens with the right to influence decisions that directly affected their lives. Elected leaders had to be accountable to those who elected them.

Hence, as a primary means by which to confer the required legitimacy upon elected governments, the holding of genuinely competitive elections suddenly became a trans-national issue of global interest. The management of elections had to meet international standards and be open to the world's scrutiny.

Operating in such a complex and rapidly changing environment, many EMBs found themselves with a dual-faceted challenge: (1) elections had to be delivered regularly,

professionally, transparently and in full compliance with recognized standards; and (2) their outcome had to enjoy the full confidence of all national and international electoral stakeholders.

## COMPLEXITIES OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT

As a key institution of a democratic governance system, the EMB has a critical role and function to conduct elections. It is imperative that an election is professionally and independently administered. That it is planned and executed in a timely fashion, and the entire process enjoys the greatest possible levels of transparency, integrity and credibility. There is a great difference between simply delivering an election and delivering a *credible* election.

Delivering a credible election means ensuring groups and individuals with a “stake” (*stakeholders*) in the electoral process are fully satisfied by the manner in which the EMB has administered all procedural and operational aspects of the electoral process. This is critical to the successful performance and fulfillment of the EMB’s mandated functions. The more electoral stakeholders satisfied with the work and outcome of the administered electoral process, the more credible and reputable the EMB becomes.

Organizing an election is an extremely complex endeavor, as it involves dealing with multiple administrative and logistical issues and operations. An election may be defined as the largest, most costly and most administratively and logistically burdensome operation at a national level that a single country could ever undertake in times of peace.

Aside from administrative and logistical operations, organizing an election is a time-bound and strictly regulated process:

- Multiple operations are run simultaneously all over the country
- Legal deadlines cannot be missed
- Limited financial resources for the electoral process must be allocated quickly, effectively and transparently
- Key operational and procedural decisions must be made quickly, with transparent standards and in full compliance with the established legal framework
- Operations exposed to security sensitivities may generate potential for political deadlocks, legal controversies, election-related violence and even large-scale conflict

If the EMB is the institution legally entrusted with administering elections, *electoral management* is the procedural, administrative and operational process through which the EMB plans, organizes and delivers an election. A core challenge for the EMB rests upon the fact that this purely technical process lays the groundwork for a politically-charged contest. So, the manner in which the EMB plans for, organizes and delivers an election assumes critical importance for public credibility of the election outcome.

Organizing an election is also an extremely costly operation, particularly in post-conflict or transitional settings. Such countries may be entirely lack pre-existing and functioning governance or administrative infrastructure.

Electoral management is a complex and large-scale set of operations. It involves a multitude of activities and sub-activities, complicated scheduling, training, employment and deployment of large masses of workers, simultaneous use of resources, logistical means and organizational assets and intricate monitoring of multiple activities. Further complexities arise with time-bound activities that must strictly comply with existing electoral legislation, and are often subjected to rigorous external scrutiny.

In addition to the above, electoral management also spans multiple and diverse fields of operation: human resources, office administration, nationwide logistical operations, delivery of professional training to thousands of electoral officers, financial control, procuring enormous quantities of electoral materials and supplies, writing regulations, enacting legal reform, registering voters, monitoring political campaigns, developing voting and counting procedures, designing and implementing civic and voter education campaigns, liaising with stakeholders, dealing with security, adjudicating electoral disputes and much more.

With numerous and diverse fields of operation to be tackled, the EMB must handle the fact that not only are all of these tasks and components interdependent, they are also time-bound by legal deadlines that must not be missed.

An additional complication for the EMB is that, generally, these tasks need to take place simultaneously (requiring a great use of human, financial and logistical resources) or sequentially (when one task is heavily

dependent upon the success of a preceding task). If any of these interlocked tasks is not performed effectively and in-time, it could very easily undermine the implementation of ensuing tasks. One missed task could disrupt the entire electoral process, no matter how successfully, transparently and efficiently all other correlated tasks were accomplished.

The operational complexities and political sensitivities inherent to electoral management, as well as potential exposure to sharp criticism and possible legal implications for mismanagement, create significant burdens. Any failure or misstep could damage the reputation of even the most experienced, reputable and credible EMB. The EMB, therefore, has the primary responsibility of carrying out its electoral management mandate as effectively as possible. It is in its own best interest – and in its long-term credibility as an institution of governance – to perform its mandated functions with the highest sense of integrity and professionalism, according to principles of independence, transparency and public accountability.

## **INHIBITORS OF EFFECTIVE ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT**

Of course, there is no single perfect system or method that can be used to ensure successful management and delivery of a credible election. Each electoral system and EMB has its own particular characteristics and strengths, as well as inherent problems and weaknesses. Every country has a different legal framework, a different social, historical and political environment, a different level of available resources and administrative infrastructures to organize and deliver an election, and different challenges and priorities.

However, setting these variables aside, it becomes evident that, by and large, the way in which the legal, administrative, procedural and operational structure of an electoral system is designed has a direct impact on the ability of an EMB to effectively, professionally and successfully perform its electoral management mandate. The ability of an EMB to successfully administer an election heavily depends upon a balanced combination of three fundamental elements:

1. Ability to plan
2. Organizational and management system
3. Level of access and availability of adequate resources

When any of these fundamental and intertwined elements is missing or insufficient, the task of administering and delivering a credible election (and maintaining it at satisfactory levels over the ensuing electoral cycles) could prove an extremely complex endeavor for any EMB, no matter how experienced, well-resourced or trusted.

A comparison of EMBs that have failed to produce credible elections over the past few years indicates that, in most cases, the reason for poor performance was their inability to effectively plan for and anticipate needs. Deficiencies in the ability to effectively plan activities and sub-activities that comprise an electoral process severely affect the performance of the EMB, both in terms of qualitative and timely performance of functions and in terms of the optimal and efficient use of human and financial resources.

Poor planning may force the EMB to operate and perform its functions in a continuous “crisis mode.” The EMB must resort to rushed, last-minute approaches to solve the problems that day-to-day management of any election normally entails. Without effective and timely planning, solutions can only be applied as a reaction to unanticipated issues. Once they occur, it may be too late to solve them in an efficient, timely, transparent, cost-effective and permanent manner. As a longer-term term issue, this may also lead to the spread of serious organizational and management deficiencies at various levels, from one electoral cycle to the next. If, on the other hand, the EMB passively waits for potential problems to appear, the EMB will only be able to react once they occur.

These problems do not only affect the way in which the EMB is expected to perform its legally-mandated functions and deliver its services, but they also have serious repercussions in the way the EMB is externally perceived and trusted by electoral stakeholders.

As discussed, a wide array of problems can result from poor planning. These include:

- Internal problems
  - Management and operational inefficiencies
  - Decisions made in a rushed or a non-consultative manner, with low levels of transparency
  - Ineffective use of funds and resources resulting from the application of costly last-minute solutions

- External problems
  - Unaddressed internal problems that affect the way in which the EMB administers the electoral process
  - Public mistrust in the process
  - Low, or steadily decreasing, turnout
  - Perception of incompetence or fraud

Unfortunately, problems caused by poor planning are not only limited to direct repercussions on the technical administration of the electoral process or the credibility of the EMB. “Reactive planning” also has great impact on the effective provision, cost and sustainability of international electoral assistance that is supposed to support the EMB in the successful performance of its functions.

When a problematic situation arises in an electoral process, depending on its extent, the international community is frequently invited to step in with financial and material support. Normally, because of an EMB’s poor planning, this type of “reactive” support is delivered very late in the period running up to the elections. It is during this period that problems are most evident and harmful and that international support has the most politically-visible impact.

Given the short time available to deliver “reactive” support, international assistance is delivered with the aim to temporarily “patch” the problem in relation to its impact on Election Day, rather than to provide enduring, permanent and sustainable support on ensuing cycles of elections. In these cases, international aid has minimal sustainability, limited effects and a quite ephemeral impact, since “patched-up”

problems, not properly addressed, will re-manifest themselves with renewed vitality in the next election.

## TURNING ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT INTO AN EFFECTIVE EXERCISE

It has been demonstrated that the extent to which an EMB effectively and strategically plans its work and activities is what ultimately determines the EMB’s level of success or failure in reaching its optimal operational performance.

For the EMB, which almost always operates in an environment of rapid change, evolving needs, strong political pressure, security risks and overall uncertainty, it is crucial to adopt effective planning strategies. The EMB needs to be able to identify and anticipate all barriers and obstacles that might prevent its departments and staff from operating at maximum levels of efficiency.

A proactive planning strategy prepares the EMB to anticipate and adequately respond to three diverse types of issues:

**Real issues.** These are issues that are visible, predictable, quantifiable and measurable issues that hinder the effective management of the electoral process and that are objectively experienced by the EMB and its staff.

**Perceived issues.** These are issues that are externally perceived by electoral stakeholders, regardless of whether they are real or non-existent. In politically sensitive and charged environments, if perceived issues are not adequately addressed in a timely manner, and analytically and publicly proved as groundless and deceitful, they can be as damaging as real ones.



**Unanticipated issues.** These are potential issues that might or might not occur for a number of unpredictable reasons (e.g., outburst of electoral violence, extensive fraud, or low turnout). Regardless, if they really happen or not, the EMB needs to have a risk-mitigation strategy in place well before these issues may occur. The EMB should anticipate the potential incidence of each potential issue and propose preventive and corrective measures that could effectively resolve or mitigate them.

Every EMB has the power to make key strategic decisions that shape and decide its future. Failing to decide, plan and act proactively means passively waiting for failure to happen.

If limited planning abilities of the EMB represent a serious obstacle for effective electoral management, then the EMB has no choice than to take resolute action to improve its planning and management abilities. It should constantly aim for the highest operational standards and optimization in the use of financial and human resources. In aiming for *operational excellence*, the main challenge for the EMB is not reaching it, but retaining and developing these levels of excellence over time, election after election.

Operational excellence can only be achieved and maintained by the EMB through a structured, coherent, sustained and long-range effort to strengthen and maximize overall planning abilities. It can only be retained through institutionalization of this effort into its organizational culture.

To turn electoral management into an effective exercise, the EMB has to strategically determine how, as an organization, it could most realistically achieve this critical goal and

transform its planning abilities from reactive to proactive. One way for the EMB to achieve the necessary transformation is to embrace and institutionalize a strategic way of thinking and acting *ahead* to address key needs and priorities relating to its effective performance, as opposed to waiting to react to issues only if and when they occur.

## WHY STRATEGIC PLANNING IN ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT?

No matter what field of activity in which an organization operates (private, public or nonprofit), there is a wide array of approaches, tools and methodologies available that aim to enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of its planning and management systems.

*Strategic planning* is one of the most widely used methods by any type of organization deciding to undertake a long-term planning exercise with a two-fold aim of enhancing their ability to anticipate and respond to needs that the organization will/may confront and of conducting a structured and long-term institutional strengthening effort. It is a disciplined process that defines the organization's strategy, or direction, and helps the organization make realistic decisions on allocating human, financial and other resources required to pursue the strategy.

This type of planning is the most commonly adopted methodology in business management in the private sector. Strategic planning is also extensively used in the public and nonprofit sectors by entities such as government ministries, public institutions, administrative bodies and international and non-governmental organizations.

It has only been in recent years that a number of well-established EMBs across the globe have been adapting these methodologies to their planning, management and operational systems. EMBs have adopted this strategic planning in various forms and to different degrees of success.

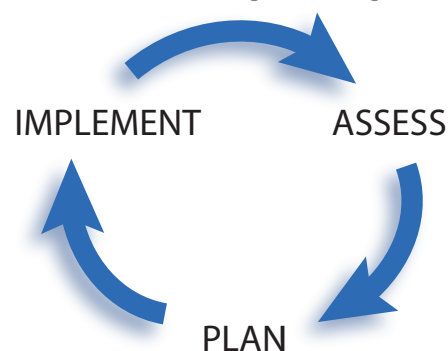
Some electoral commissions operating at national and provincial levels (e.g., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Pakistan and Indonesia) have produced, in recent years, a number of excellent strategic plans using this disciplined planning and management tool to define and guide their long-term institutional and operational strengthening efforts.<sup>5</sup>

The experiences of these EMBs demonstrate how strategic planning techniques for long-range management of electoral operations allowed them to attain significant achievements and measurable results, year after year. These EMBs have used strategic planning methodologies to regularly assess (and re-assess) their institutional and functional needs and efficiently respond to various administrative, procedural, management and operational challenges that organizing and delivering an election always entail.

Multi-year planning allows the EMB to optimize performance, deliver efficient and comprehensive services to voters, maximize use of often limited financial and human resources and strengthen itself as a professional and credible institution of governance. Furthermore, the ability of the EMB to clearly and realistically plan the performance of its functions, over the longterm, greatly increases its chances of

<sup>5</sup> Links to samples of these Strategic Plans are provided in the Annex.

Figure 3: Strategic Planning Tool



obtaining more financial resources from the state's budget and more external assistance from the international donor community.

Although some electoral commissions have adopted strategic planning methodologies in their work, this innovative management tool remains unknown to a great number of EMBs. Many EMBs have never considered this type of forward-looking planning. Rather, the main focus has been to organize and deliver election after election, reacting to challenges only if and when they arise.

The EMBs that have used some form of a strategic planning tool are the ones that have realized that one of the most distinguishing characteristics of strategic planning is that this methodology can be used for a wide variety of purposes in their work (Fig. 3).

First, it can be used as an **assessment tool**. Strategic planning sets out a consistent and systematic framework to guide the EMB in initiating a consultative process of self-examination, and internal and external assessment. Through this examination, the EMB can:

- Identify its strengths and its weaknesses (both real and perceived)
- Define key strategic priorities
- Devise and put in place concrete measures for effectively and realistically meeting these priorities

As an assessment tool, strategic planning helps the EMB anticipate external or internal issues it might confront, evaluate how likely these issues are to happen, the impact they may have on work and performance and plan for effective solutions before they happen.

Second, it can be used as a **planning tool**. Strategic planning encourages the EMB to make decisions with sufficient knowledge, allowing exploration of alternative and innovative ways of accomplishing tasks. A pre-assessment of *future* implications of decisions made in the present will emphasize the collective responsibility of EMB staff in successful planning (and implementation) of all operations comprising an electoral process.

Increasing demands for EMBs to deliver higher quality services, with limited resources and increasing expectations of electoral stakeholders create an extremely challenging and continually changing operating environment. Most EMBs react to these demands without real, active input and with short-sighted solutions. Strategic planning encourages the EMB to plan for and anticipate change by “thinking ahead” at least three to five years. This allows the EMB to proactively seek and pursue change, rather than passively and reactively adapt to that change.

Therefore, as a planning tool, this methodology transforms the planning capabilities of the EMB from passive and reactive to proactive, collaborative and structured. It allows the EMB to strategically “think ahead” and determine where it currently is, where it intends to go and what needs to be done to get there.

Finally, strategic planning can be used as an **implementation tool**. Strategic planning enables the EMB to define a clear vision and a common purpose. This allows for the development of a realistic, written Strategic Plan that defines the strategic activities required by the EMB and its staff at all levels to meet its vision.

A developed Strategic Plan will then translate into a detailed Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan comprises a range of supporting activities which are implemented (and monitored) under a systematic framework provided by this methodology.

*We must be the change we wish to see in the world.*

*Mohandas Gandhi*

# Strategic Planning for Effective Electoral Management

## WHAT IS STRATEGIC PLANNING?

By definition, *strategy* is an overarching, long-term plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal. Hence, *strategic planning* is systematic planning, over a defined period of time, which facilitates the effective management of a process to achieve a particular goal.

Strategic planning is a process of self-examination that allows an organization to organize the *present* on the basis of its projections of a desired *future*. In order to determine where it desires to go, the organization needs to know exactly where it currently stands (*present* or *current status*). Once the present is established, the organization can determine where it wants to be in a defined period of time (*future*) and how it actually will get there (*strategy*).

This methodology guides the electoral management body in using a structured system to institutionalize a culture of continuous improvement at all levels of the organization.

By undertaking a long-term strategic planning process, the EMB can establish a comprehensive and coherent framework for:

**Proactive thinking.** Anticipating potential obstacles, identifying key priorities, setting clear targets, defining strategies and allocating required resources for successfully fulfilling its mandated functions

**Strategic management.** Pursuit of key priorities through the disciplined execution of activities, achieving targets in a calculated manner and constantly monitoring progress

The Strategic Plan is the document resulting from the process of defining these strategic elements. It is the written roadmap that takes the EMB from its current status to where it desires to be in the future by combining the aforementioned strategic elements.

Normally, the strategic planning process does not end when the strategic plan is completed. On the contrary, this is when action begins. At this stage, an Implementation Plan is derived from the Strategic Plan. It is a highly detailed plan formulated at departmental levels to achieve identified strategic objectives. This plan also involves the deployment of individual responsibilities to various teams working within each EMB department.

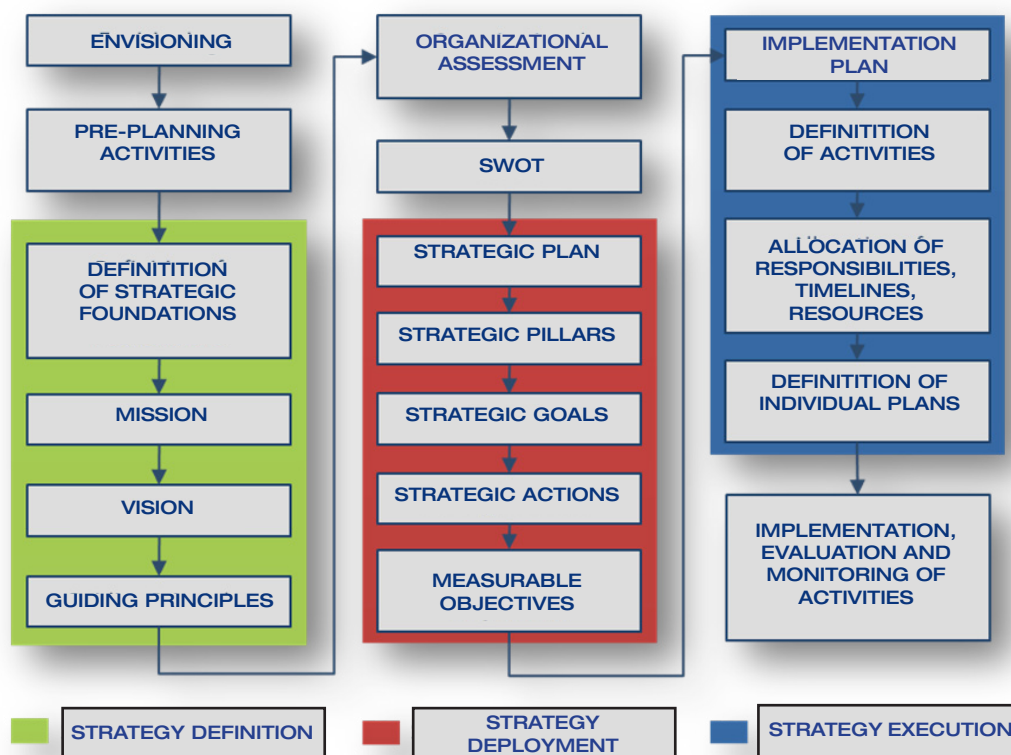
There is not a single method or unified approach for conducting a strategic planning exercise. In fact, there are a wide variety of tools, models and approaches commonly used by organizations, across all sectors, undertaking multi-year strategic planning efforts.

In general, implementation of a strategic planning process follows a pre-established sequence of actions, or steps. However, these steps are often implemented with wide degrees of adaptation and customization, in terms of timing, chronological order and activities conducted.

The flow chart (Fig. 4) depicts a brief overview of the typical activities in a strategic planning exercise:

- *Envisioning* is the expression of the organization's long-term commitment to this process and the necessary pre-planning activities to make it happen
- *Defining strategic foundations* of the organization (mission, vision, guiding principles) states where the organization wishes to be in the future
- Performing an *organizational assessment* establishes the organization's current status
- *Defining the strategy* of the organization bridges the gap between where the organization is and where it aspires to go to achieve its vision
- Producing a *Strategic Plan* sets the overall strategic direction of the organization, highlighting strategic pillars, goals, actions, and measurable objectives
- Generating an *Implementation Plan* involves assigning timelines and key responsibilities to departments and individuals of the organization and allocating needed resources
- Putting the Implementation Plan into action initiates the *implementation, evaluation and monitoring of activities*

Figure 4: Definition, Deployment and Execution



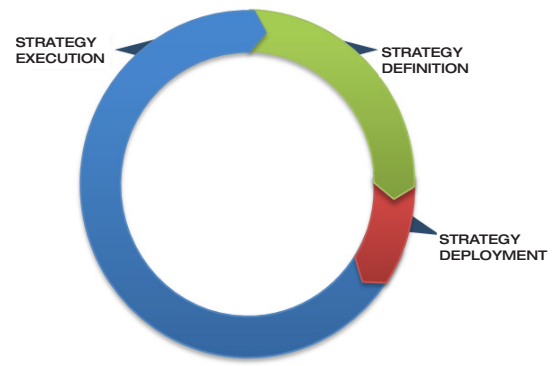
## APPROACH AND DURATION OF A STRATEGIC PLANNING EXERCISE

In electoral management, the choice by an EMB of a specific strategic planning approach, methodology, sequence of steps and definition of related activities may vary. Possible choices taken depend on the combination of diverse internal and external factors that influence the context and realities in which the EMB operates.

These internal and external factors may vary for each case and generally include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Complexity of the social, political, economic and democratic environment of a given country
- Legal electoral framework in the country
- Model of the EMB (e.g., governmental, independent or mixed)
- Nature of the EMB's mandate and type of services it is entrusted to deliver
- Approach of EMB leadership
- EMB's hierarchical and organizational culture
- Level of administrative performance
- Level of institutional development
- Staff size and EMB's infrastructure
- Level of professionalism (expertise and ethical behavior)

Figure 5: Definition, Deployment and Execution



- Overall reputation and credibility of the EMB among its key electoral stakeholders

- Source and availability of funding

The duration of a single strategic planning effort may also vary depending on the election calendar of the country in which the EMB operates. An important distinction should be made between a long-range strategic planning process and the time duration of the specific stages that comprise this process.

To clearly understand in broad terms the approximate duration of each stage of the process, it may be useful to look at strategic planning as a revolving cycle,<sup>6</sup> with a new strategic planning effort starting as soon as the previous one has concluded (Fig. 5).

With this concept, the revolving cycle can be divided into three main stages or segments:

**Strategy definition stage.** In this initial stage, the EMB defines its strategic

<sup>6</sup> This concept anticipates the Strategic Planning Cycle described later in this chapter, see Section: *The Strategic Planning Cycle*.

direction by establishing its current position, envisioning its desired future and devising the strategy of how to get there.

This segment could encompass a period ranging from a few weeks to several months.

**Strategy deployment stage.** In this stage, the EMB translates the vision for its strategic direction into a detailed plan of action, determining in detail each step through which the organization will reach its desired future. This segment could encompass a period of a few weeks.

**Strategy execution stage.** In this concluding stage, the EMB implements, monitors and evaluates all activities comprising its plan of action. This segment could encompass a period of several years, depending on the timeframe the EMB has established for the strategic planning process.

Having defined these three key stages, a second important distinction needs to be made between the two first segments and the third.

The first two segments represent the core of the EMB's strategic planning effort, where strategy is defined and translated into an Implementation Plan. The third segment is the execution of the EMB's Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan determines the way in which the EMB performs and fulfills its mandated functions in the long term. This plan, in terms of time and commitment, lists all the functions of the EMB which would be executed regardless of the first two strategic planning segments.

In other words, the first two stages shape and guide the way in which the third stage is implemented. This means that while strategic planning has a multi-year duration and represents a long-term commitment, in reality, the actual strategic planning activities (stages one and two) are relatively short term. Nonetheless, they determine the way in which the EMB defines, plans, delivers, monitors and evaluates all activities in the long term.

Ultimately, the choice of a strategic planning methodology and the approach to be used rests upon the EMB itself. Numerous considerations must be carefully evaluated by the EMB before embarking on this long-term, disciplined planning process. The EMB can best define its own preferred strategic planning methodology, after adequately familiarizing itself with the process, what levels of sustained commitment and dedication are required from its staff, what resources are needed to execute it and what the EMB can or cannot realistically achieve by engaging in such a long range strategic effort.

Key requirements for a successful strategic planning process are described in detail in the next sections of this Chapter.

## WHAT STRATEGIC PLANNING IS NOT

In order to clearly define what strategic planning *is*, it is important to clarify what strategic planning *is not*:

**Strategic planning is never a short-term exercise.** Rather, it is a future-oriented, forward-looking process with a clear vision and long-term duration, generally three to five years. In reality, the duration depends

on the organization implementing the process and the nature of its work. Strategic planning is never a quick fix to solve a major crisis affecting the EMB, but a long-term management tool that pays off over time.

**Strategic planning is not simply developing a nicely written plan.** Rather, it is a process about the leadership engaging others to collectively achieve the EMB's vision. Strategic planning fails when the vision is set and action does not follow. It is a process that charts a direction and determines the course for reaching an identified destination.

**Strategic planning is not about producing a static document.** Rather, it is a living plan that can deviate as circumstances and conditions change, in order to take maximum advantage of emerging opportunities. It can respond to unexpected and evolving challenges. After the plan is developed, based on a desired future, a multitude of circumstances may arise requiring the EMB to revise its content.

**Strategic planning is never a one-time event.** Rather, it is an ongoing process that must be flexible to address the changing environment in which the organization operates. It requires a firm commitment<sup>7</sup> on the part of the EMB to continuous engagement and action. Engaging in a strategic planning process without the required commitment, resources and continuity would likely result in a loss of momentum and would undermine the whole process.

**Strategic planning is not a process to be driven and implemented externally.**

Rather, it is a process that needs to be entirely owned and driven by the EMB. It requires strong institutional support and formal endorsement by EMB leadership. To ensure ownership and sustainability, this process should never be led externally (i.e., by international electoral assistance providers). If needed, external support may be provided in the form of strategic planning expertise to the EMB to facilitate the process.

**Strategic planning is never a plan of action for day-to-day operations.** Rather, it detaches the EMB from its day-to-day activities, enabling it to achieve a broader perspective of its overall, long-ranging purpose. Strategic planning provides the EMB with a clear vision of what it actually wants to achieve and how to go about achieving it.

**Strategic planning is not a panacea to resolve critical issues threatening the EMB.** Rather, it is a set of concepts, procedures and tools designed to help the EMB understand the current situation, plan for the future and act strategically. Used in an appropriate and capable way, it can help the EMB focus on effective decisions and actions that improve its performance, promote the EMB's mission, achieve its legal mandate and satisfy its key stakeholders.

<sup>7</sup> See Section: *Key Requirements for a Successful Strategic Planning Process*.



## MAIN BENEFITS FOR PLANNING STRATEGICALLY

When deciding to engage in a strategic planning process and develop a multi-year strategic plan, there are a number of obvious benefits and significant advantages to consider. This planning management tool, with its forward-looking approach, empowers the EMB to:

**Be strategic and consistent.** This disciplined planning methodology enables the EMB to establish realistic goals and objectives that are consistent with its mission and to pursue them in a calculated manner. It allows the EMB to define realistic strategies; allocate needed resources; set periodic milestones to measure progress and success; and monitor the entire process. If it is well planned and executed, strategic planning provides a strong rationale for achieving the EMB's set goals and targets.

**Promote communication.** Strategic planning facilitates communication. It fosters timely, transparent and orderly decision-making as well as successful implementation of activities, goals and objectives. It improves communication among members of the EMB's executive management and amongst its staff across subsidiary levels of the organization.

**Manage for results.** In performing its functions, the EMB must produce results against very stringent timeframes and often in charged political environments. These results are also subject to systematic scrutiny by external electoral stakeholders. Strategic planning is a process of self-examination. This process is an essential

part of a results-driven management system that electoral administration requires. This process relies on the EMB's commitment to a long-term, disciplined effort of careful consideration on its own organizational and institutional capabilities against the political and cultural environment in which it operates. It also sets targets for performance, incorporates ways to monitor progress at regular intervals of time and provides EMB staff with guidance for ongoing operations and budgets.

**Attain a common purpose.** Strategic planning fosters participation in the process of defining a common vision and a common purpose. This helps the EMB build consensus and understanding of where the organization is headed and why it is following that course. Equipped with precise information, staff can align themselves in a common purpose and shared goals towards the EMB's mission.

**Develop a sense of ownership.** If conducted effectively, strategic planning provides for a real sense of ownership by the staff of the EMB who have planned, organized and consistently conducted this process. This process assists the EMB in producing its own decisions and defining the actions that shape and guide what the EMB does, why it does it, how it does it and where it will be in the future. Ownership, in turn, is the primary requisite for guaranteeing that the resulting strategic plan is relevant and customized to the specific context of the local environment in which it is to be implemented.

## **Adapt to the changing environment.**

Strategic planning allows the EMB to develop a system to institutionalize continuous improvement at all levels of the organization. Even though this methodology takes a long-range approach, a strategic plan can be updated based on new information and/or changed political, financial or operational environments. The use of milestones, regular updates and reviews to determine progress and re-assess the plan allows for ample margins of time for adaptation and flexible planning.

**Strive for excellence.** Strategic planning provides a structured framework and focus for improvement efforts within the EMB, optimizing its organizational systems, serving as a means to set standards for excellence, assessing progress in meeting goals and objectives and offering guidance to managers for day-to-day decisions. By providing the EMB with a clear focus, it produces more efficiency and effectiveness so the EMB can optimize its resources on key priorities.

## **INVOLVING KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS**

Dealing with key stakeholders in an electoral process might prove difficult if operational and political pressure before an electoral event is high or the political environment is charged with high levels of suspicion and mistrust in the performance of the EMB's mandated functions.

All individuals, groups and organizations holding a direct *stake* (interest) in the EMB's ethical conduct and operations are

*electoral stakeholders*. For the purpose of this Guide, EMB stakeholders can be categorized as:

**Internal stakeholders.** EMB's constituents, such as the EMB's branches and subordinate offices at the local level (regional, provincial and municipal offices).

**External stakeholders.** Political parties and candidates; executive branches of the government; legislatures; electoral dispute resolution bodies; the judicial system; election monitors and observers (domestic and international); media; electorate (actual and prospective voters); civil society organizations; local communities and minority groups; international donor community and electoral assistance providers.

Since each internal and external electoral stakeholder holds different roles, profiles, levels of interest and specific needs, it is imperative the EMB foster fluent communication and consult with each stakeholder at an early stage of the strategic planning process. This is a fundamental factor to ensure the ultimate success of strategic planning efforts.

The potential benefits for the EMB to involve key internal and external stakeholders in the strategic planning efforts are multiple, including:

**A broader perspective.** Wide-ranging input provided by different stakeholders provides strong legitimacy to the strategic planning process and supports the EMB in making key decisions required to achieve its vision. Perspectives of external stakeholders

allow the EMB to take a step back and see itself from the outside, become more innovative and go beyond the ordinary way of addressing issues that may affect its performance.

**Stakeholder ownership.** The more stakeholders perceive a sense of contribution and ownership in the process of defining the EMB strategic plan, the greater the chance of successful implementation.

**Acceptance.** The greater the involvement of key electoral stakeholders within the EMB in shaping the strategic plan, the greater the chance of broad acceptance of the EMB's strategic direction, decisions and actions.

**Transparency.** The EMB that openly communicates, receives and uses feedback from its stakeholders will increase transparency of the strategic planning process; be able to provide a stronger rationale for each decision and action; and mitigate perceptions that the EMB is pursuing political, hidden or biased agendas.

Stakeholder consultation may take place at different levels of the EMB, with different formats, methods and in different stages of the strategic planning process. Stakeholder consultation is a critical factor for ensuring the success of a strategic planning process. The EMB should not engage in a process of consultation with its stakeholders just for the sake of putting this essential step “on the record.”

The EMB should remain aware of the consequences of not having adequately involved its key electoral stakeholders

in the definition of its strategic plan.

When stakeholders feel they have been excluded, the EMB may experience a lack of public confidence and trust in the EMB strategic planning process, and an increase in misunderstandings, mistrust, criticism and suspicions about its crucial planning activities and related decisions and actions.

## WHEN SHOULD STRATEGIC PLANNING BE CONDUCTED?

For an EMB, electoral management is an ongoing, structured process aimed at achieving the EMB's set of goals and improving outcomes, from one electoral cycle to the next. Normally, this process reaches its highest level of activity in the two most operationally-intense periods: the *pre-election* and *election* segments of the electoral cycle.

In contrast, the EMB can enjoy moments of reduced operational activity in the *post-election period* (or *period between elections*). The post-election period encompasses the time from the completion of an election event to the beginning of preparatory activities and operations that need to take place for the next electoral event.

An electoral cycle does not have a predetermined time span, and it can vary significantly according to each country, electoral system and election calendar. This means that, in any given country, depending on the combination of a number of diverse factors, a post-election period could typically unfold for a period of two or three years (in some cases up to five years) without any major election event taking place at a national level.

It is precisely during the post-election period that some EMBs experience the tendency to enter into a sort of “electoral hibernation.” Usually, this is due to the fact that they are recovering from operational fatigue and considerable political pressure of preparing and delivering the election. Or they are reducing activities due to staff turnover, low motivation due to no elections in sight or lack of resources.

The actual paradox of this situation consists in the fact that, during this protracted period of time, some EMBs tend to significantly reduce their activities, simply waiting for the next electoral event to take place, but not necessarily getting ready for it.

In reality, the post-election period is potentially the most strategically important phase of an electoral cycle, since this period is exactly when the EMB could most adequately focus its time, energies and resources on broader, long-term activities, such as planning, capacity development programs for staff and other institutional strengthening initiatives.

The post-election period provides an ideal window of opportunity for the EMB to engage in a multi-year strategic planning process because there are no major elections to run and political and operational pressure to deliver a credible election event is at its lowest. An operational slowdown is actually the best time for initiating a strategic exercise because it is a natural point at which to pause and reflect.

As described earlier in this guide, a strategic planning process is not a one-

time event, or a short-time activity to be conducted extemporaneously, in an unplanned or improvised way. On the contrary, this process requires adequate groundwork, planning and preparation, to ensure that it is fully *owned* by the EMB and is suitable to the purpose, needs and objectives it is expected to achieve.

When undertaking the comprehensive effort of producing a multi-year strategic plan, the EMB defines its core organizational purpose as an institution of governance. It also establishes realistic goals and objectives to be achieved in a set timeframe within the EMB's capacity for implementation. Adopting, designing, planning, implementing these activities and monitoring their progress require an adequate period of time.

Hence, given its long-term nature and its cyclical and forward-looking approach, strategic planning has a close inter-relation with and dependency on the post-election segment of an electoral cycle. In a way, beginning a strategic planning exercise, soon after an election event is complete, could be considered as the activity that marks the end of one electoral cycle and sets the course for the next.

## THE STRATEGIC PLANNING CYCLE

As in an electoral cycle, the methodology used in a strategic planning exercise is also based on a cyclical and revolving process; unfolding through several steps, each with a well-defined start and completion stage.

Hence, regardless of the strategic planning approach adopted by the EMB, the implementation of this methodology revolves around a sequential set of actions – or steps – which are closely linked and interdependent. Implementation of each step is not only heavily reliant upon the successful completion of the preceding one, but also essential for both the start and the successful conclusion of the ensuing step.

Figure 6 depicts the cyclical nature of a **Strategic Planning Cycle** and the sequence and interdependency of each of the segments comprising it.

As the diagram illustrates, the Strategic Planning Cycle follows a revolving process that unfolds through the implementation of a systematic and sequential methodology. This process could cover the entire duration of the post-election period, or it could even exceed it. As soon as a Strategic Planning Cycle has concluded, it is time for the EMB to start a new cycle and address new and evolving needs.

Figure 6: The Strategic Planning Cycle



The most obvious strength in the Strategic Planning Cycle is that this approach sets off a virtuous circle empowering the EMB (as the *institution*) and its staff (those who *belong* to the institution) in a locally owned, self-determined and self-led process. The cycle aims to increase management and operational excellence in the mandated functions of the EMB. With time, this process will be absorbed and institutionalized by the EMB, becoming its ordinary way of planning and operating.

However, it should be highlighted that the production of a written strategic plan is not by itself a sufficient and final goal for a strategic planning process. Its ultimate purpose is to inform and shape an implementation plan and the related activities comprising it.

## OVERVIEW OF THE STEPS IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING CYCLE

It has already been mentioned, earlier in this Guide, that through the implementation of a strategic planning process, the EMB is assisted in the establishment of a comprehensive and coherent framework for strategic thinking and proactive action.

This systematic framework unfolds through the sequential implementation of several main steps of the Strategic Planning Cycle. Figure 7 provides an overview of each step of the cycle, as well as a short description of the outputs produced at the completion of each step.

Before continuing to the next section of this Chapter, it should be noted that the Public Strategic Plan ultimately produced by the

EMB at the end of the strategic planning exercise draws from a combination of the following three key strategic outputs:

1. Key Strategic Output 1: Strategic Foundations Document (upon completion of Step 2)
2. Key Strategic Output 2: Strategy into Action Plan (upon completion of Step 6)
3. Key Strategic Output 3: Strategy into Execution Plan or the Implementation Plan (upon completion of Step 7)

While outputs 1 and 2 are for internal and external use, output 3 is a highly detailed implementation plan *only* for internal use of the EMB.

## KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

As with any rigorous and consistent planning and management methodology, there are a number of key requirements needed to ensure the strategic planning process produces expected, realistic and effective results (Fig. 8). These are:

**Vision.** The EMB needs to have a clear vision for its strategic planning exercise. The vision describes a set of ideals and priorities, a picture of the future, a core set of principles for which EMB staff stand and a broad set of compelling criteria that will help define its organizational, institutional and operational success.

Figure 7: Strategic Planning Cycle with Outputs

STEP:	ACTION:	DESCRIPTION:	RESULTING OUTPUT/S:
0	ENVISION	<i>Envision.</i> If the EMB has never conducted strategic planning before, this is the formal adoption and commitment to a long-term strategic planning process; or	<i>Envision.</i> The <b>Strategic Planning Brief</b> formally expresses EMB's institutional commitment to the process.
	REVIEW	<i>Review.</i> If the EMB has just concluded a Strategic Planning Cycle, this is the time to conduct a Strategic Planning Cycle review.	<i>Review.</i> The <b>Strategic Planning Cycle Review</b> is a thorough review of the previous Strategic Planning Cycle, drawing key lessons learned that can be applied to the next cycle.
1	PLAN	Definition, planning and preparation of the EMB's strategic planning process.	The <b>Strategic Planning Master Plan</b> outlines the preparatory work, activities and timeframe to conduct the strategic planning process.
2	DEFINE	Definition of the EMB's Strategic Foundations (its mission, vision and guiding principles).	The <b>Strategic Foundations Document</b> (Key Strategic Output 1) is the first of the three key outputs produced at the end of the Strategic Planning Cycle.
3	ASSESS	Conduct of the EMB's internal and external Organizational Assessments and SWOT Analysis.	The EMB's <b>Organizational Appraisal</b> determines the EMB's current status through the organizational assessment and the SWOT Analysis.
4	IDENTIFY	Conduct of a Gap Analysis to identify the EMB's strategic pillars and strategic goals.	The draft <b>Strategy into Action Plan</b> identifies Strategic Pillars and Goals needed to fill the gap between where the EMB wants to be and where the EMB is.
5	CONSULT	Broad consultation process with key internal and external stakeholders on the basis of the draft Strategy into Action Plan.	The <b>Stakeholder Consultation Report</b> gathers, analyzes and categorizes input provided by key internal and external stakeholders during the consultation process.
6	STRATEGIZE	Incorporation of feedback obtained through the stakeholders' consultation; undertaking action planning (definition of the EMB's strategic actions and setting of measurable objectives); defining activities, setting timelines and allocating resources at the EMB's departmental level; finalization of the Strategy into Action Plan.	The final EMB <b>Strategy into Action Plan</b> (Key Strategic Output 2) defines the strategic objectives and actions (at a departmental level) required to enable the EMB to achieve its Vision.
7	DEPLOY	Undertaking the strategy deployment process; turning strategic actions into activities; assigning individual responsibilities; developing the Strategy into Execution Plan; drafting and disseminating the EMB's Public Strategic Plan.	The first output produced through this step is the <b>Strategy into Execution Plan/Implementation Plan</b> (Key Strategic Output 3) a highly detailed implementation plan establishing activities at individual levels, assigning responsibilities and providing operational timelines.  The second output is the EMB's <b>Public Strategic Plan</b> , a public document summarizing why the EMB exists, what it is trying to accomplish and how it will go about doing so.
8	EXECUTE	Execution of the EMB's <b>Implementation Plan</b> entails establishing a meaningful monitoring system; monitoring and evaluating progress of workplans; accommodating change in workplans.	The <b>Milestones Progress Review</b> is a quarterly review of the progress made every three months by each department in the achievement of milestones set for each activity; submitted to the EMB Executive Management for consideration and possible action.

The vision is a critical requirement for success because it attracts commitment and drives the EMB staff, creates a purpose for their work and sets a standard of excellence for everyone in the organization. While the vision is grounded in the present, it looks to the future.

**Ownership.** It is of crucial importance that the EMB “owns” the strategic planning process. This is a primary requisite for guaranteeing that the strategic planning exercise – and resulting written plan – will be suitable, relevant and customized to the EMB and the specific environment which this process serves.

**Resources.** Resources keep the strategic planning process running. The EMB should realistically allocate sufficient resources (financial, personnel, time) to the strategic planning process. Without devoting sufficient resources, the EMB will simply fail to accomplish its strategic planning goals.

**Knowledge.** The strategic planning process requires diverse types of knowledge, including personal knowledge of EMB staff, acquired through their work; codified knowledge expressed in documents, rules, routines, or operating procedures; and cultural knowledge based on experience, observation and reflection on its environment.

**Action.** If not followed by action, a strategic vision will remain just an unfulfilled statement or aspiration. An action-oriented vision should express core values that inform the action itself and create the EMB’s requisite capabilities to realistically implement that action.

## MANAGING POTENTIAL RISKS

There may be instances in which the EMB experiences difficulties in the implementation of its strategic planning process. Or, after completing its Public Strategic Plan, it ends up not being implemented. This may occur even if the planning process was conducted using the most effective methodologies and facilitation techniques. Being predominantly based on assumptions for a distant future, strategic planning presents potential risks and uncertainties by default.

It is never easy for an organization to be proactive in planning, since it involves making key institutional and operational decisions based on assumptions and projections about a largely uncertain, yet desired, future. The longer an organization spends on proactive planning, the degree of uncertainty and potential risks an EMB can face are minimized.

If underestimated, these risks could compromise the long-term and sustained efforts undertaken by the EMB and its staff,

Figure 8: Key Requirements for a Successful Strategic Planning Process

KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS:						
VISION	→	OWNERSHIP	→	RESOURCES	→	KNOWLEDGE → ACTION = SUCCESS
X	→	OWNERSHIP	→	RESOURCES	→	KNOWLEDGE → ACTION = CONFUSION
VISION	→	X	→	RESOURCES	→	KNOWLEDGE → ACTION = REJECTION
VISION	→	OWNERSHIP	→	X	→	KNOWLEDGE → ACTION = UNFULFILLMENT
VISION	→	OWNERSHIP	→	RESOURCES	→	X → ACTION = UNCERTAINTY
VISION	→	OWNERSHIP	→	RESOURCES	→	KNOWLEDGE → X = FAILURE



who invested energy, resources and time in envisioning a desired future that simply did not materialize.

To be successful, the strategic planning process requires effective assessment and management of potential risks and uncertainties. The EMB can manage these risks and uncertainties by incorporating a realistic risk analysis into its strategic planning process and developing a risk management system.

Such a system provides the EMB with an effective structure for the identification, analysis, documentation and management of potential risks. It helps the EMB to respond to incorrect assumptions or rapidly changing conditions in a timely fashion and to adapt to these changes with much greater flexibility.

When attempting to identify potential risk, the following questions could be posed and answered:

- What possible risk could occur?
- What could be the causes for this risk to occur?
- How can the chance for this risk be reduced?
- After applying corrective measures, what is the likelihood for this risk to still occur?
- If this risk does occur despite corrective measures, what more can be done?
- What will the impact be?

When potential risks manifest themselves and are effectively managed by the EMB, they can become an opportunity for success and improved performance. If, instead, these risks manifest themselves unexpectedly and/or are poorly addressed by the EMB, they can severely hamper the EMB's strategic planning efforts. These risks may include:

**Lack of leadership commitment.** The strategic planning process may not enjoy the required commitment and adequate level of support from the EMB's executive management. When the EMB's executive management shows no clear commitment or sustained support to the strategic planning process, neither will anyone else.

The executive management must be the driving force behind the strategic planning process. Without protracted commitment, support, determination and focus, strategic planning is doomed to fail.

**Failure to adequately plan and commit resources.** The strategic planning process may not completely suit the purpose, nature and needs of the EMB. The strategic planning process might not be sufficiently owned and understood by the EMB. The lack of required levels of ownership by its Executive Management and/or staff often results in a planning process that fails to meet the specific needs of the EMB and adequately allocate required resources.

It is important for a strategic plan to explicitly mention the specific resource on which each activity relies; who will be involved; what is the time commitment

for individuals; what priority level this process requires; and what funds are needed and from which departmental budgets. The plan should be explicit and detailed in the allocation and use of the EMB's human and financial resources. It should also have the commitment of every department manager before the process is implemented. If resources are not allocated and committed properly, the strategic planning process will stop as soon as these resources run out.

**Inadaptability.** The strategic planning process may not thoroughly address the most critical aspects of the internal or external environments in which the EMB operates and, consequently, may not be flexible and realistic enough to adapt and meet rapidly changing needs. One of the most frequent reasons for an ineffective strategic planning process is the failure to include external feedback from key stakeholders. When this happens, strategic planning only focuses on what the EMB is doing at present and internally, and not as much on how the EMB might improve its current levels of performance. In other words, planning efforts end up just fine-tuning what the EMB is already doing, rather than realistically identifying existing weaknesses to prevent forthcoming threats and maximize the use of strengths to attain its vision.

**Poor risk assessment.** The strategic planning process may not incorporate a risk assessment/management methodology that enables the EMB to adequately understand or consider how the EMB itself could fail to achieve and sustain its desired levels of performance; or how it could fail to improve its operating

margins; ensure the highest efficiency in employment of resources and assets; or meet expectations of key stakeholders.

In conclusion, in undertaking a strategic planning process, the EMB has to effectively identify, document and assess what risks it may encounter. It must understand how it could fail to determine how best to anticipate these risks and more readily identify and address them. This means that the ability for the EMB to anticipate and prevent potential risks must be built into the strategic planning process.

# Implementing the Strategic Planning Cycle

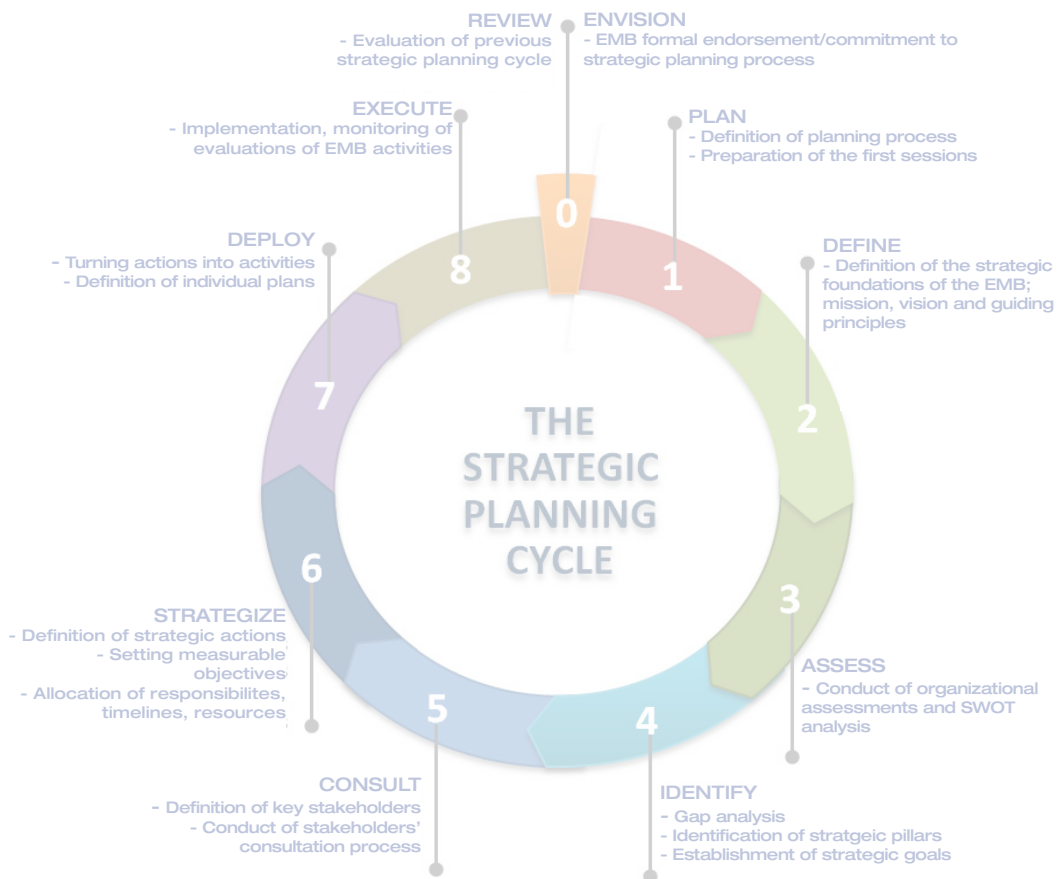
*Vision without action  
is a daydream.  
Action without vision  
is a nightmare.  
Japanese proverb*

This chapter outlines the step-by-step process to implement the Strategic Planning Cycle, from beginning to completion. This process has been developed to reflect the concept, the methodology and the sequence of the stages of the cycle that have been described in the previous sections of this Guide.

Under each step there is a description of the process and suggested activities the EMB can implement to complete each step of the cycle. The purpose and expected outputs of each step are also detailed.

Once the EMB decides to engage in a strategic planning process to develop a multi-year plan to enhance its planning and management capacities, the first question normally asked is: Where do we start?

This is where the Strategic Planning Cycle begins.



## STEP 0: ENVISION

STEP 1:  
PLAN

STEP 2:  
DEFINE

STEP 3:  
ASSESS

STEP 4:  
IDENTIFY

STEP 5:  
CONSULT

STEP 6:  
STRATEGIZE

STEP 7:  
DEPLOY

STEP 8:  
EXECUTE

### STEP 0 - ENVISION/REVIEW: ENDORISING/REVIEWING THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Strategic Planning Cycle begins with a vision of the entire process. Before starting to truly organize the strategic planning process, the EMB must prepare for the undertaking. For example, if the EMB is new to strategic planning, then it may need to take a more gradual approach than an EMB that is already familiar with this methodology.

#### Output(s) of Step 0:

*Envision.* Strategic Planning Brief

*Review.* Strategic Planning Cycle Review

Choosing the most suitable timing is also an extremely important factor. There could be an election only a few months away, a major re-organization in the structure of the EMB or possible reforms to the legal framework of the elections being considered. In these cases, strategic planning should be postponed.

Step 0 (zero) begins the Strategic Planning Cycle. If this is the first strategic planning exercise undertaken by the EMB, envisioning is the first step. If the EMB is familiar with strategic planning, then it may start with a review instead.

**Envision.** If the EMB's Executive Management is unfamiliar with this methodology, the envisioning step serves to provide an initial, general understanding of what strategic planning is; how this methodology is implemented; what it intends to achieve and what benefits it brings to the EMB. This

step is essential because it allows the EMB's executive management to appreciate the sense of ownership, level of commitment and resources this long-term process will require – should they decide to undertake it.

There are cases, however, in which envisioning might be needed as well at the second Strategic Planning Cycle. For example, in cases where turnover in the EMB's Executive Management resulted in a loss of strategic planning knowledge, envisioning will be needed to address the absence of crucial know-how among new, key decision makers.

Ideally, envisioning should be conducted by an experienced strategic planning expert familiar with the methodology defined by this Guide or other existing strategic planning materials.

A Strategic Planning Brief is the output of the envisioning process. This document should be prepared and formally endorsed by the EMB's executive management. The Brief states the EMB's long-term institutional commitment to the entire strategic planning process and defines the main actions/activities to be implemented for initiating this process.

**Review.** The alternative to envisioning is review. If the EMB is familiar with strategic planning methodologies, or if a cycle was just completed, this step serves to conduct a thorough review to assess key lessons learned during implementation of the concluding cycle and apply them to the next cycle.

A Strategic Planning Cycle Review report is the output if Step 0 is implemented as a review of the recently concluded cycle. This report is a final assessment of the full Strategic Planning Cycle, drawing key lessons learned to be applied to the ensuing cycle.

The formal commitment of the EMB to a multi-year strategic planning process should be shared with internal and external stakeholders of the EMB. The commitment of the EMB should be made public through media and be communicated and explained to its local branch offices at subsidiary levels.

## Activities for Step 0:

- Conduct the Induction Meeting
- Prepare the Strategic Planning Brief
- Communicate the EMB's Commitment Internally and Externally
- Conduct a Strategic Planning Cycle Review

## CONDUCT THE INDUCTION MEETING

Securing the support and commitment of the EMB's executive management is an initial, fundamental step. Their support and commitment ensures operational and institutional change will be meaningful and realistic and affect all levels of the organization. It is important to know that this level of change must be driven by the executive management and last throughout the Strategic Planning Cycle's duration.

The EMB's executive management decides who should be involved, what and how many resources can be allocated, the duration and

when key strategic decisions must be made. Obtaining commitment and formal endorsement of the EMB's executive management in the overall process (and in the steps through which this process unfolds) is essential because it creates the requisite sense of ownership needed to guide and sustain the hard work of this multi-year effort at all levels in the organization.

The initial induction of the EMB executive management should take place by arranging an ad hoc meeting for the executive management, department managers and other select staff. Alternatively, this meeting could be arranged in a form of a seminar or workshop (see sample Curriculum for a Strategic Planning Seminar in the Annex).

At the meeting, the strategic planning expert should:

- Provide the EMB audience with, in simple language, an overall description and understanding of what strategic planning is and how various steps will be implemented.
- Guide the EMB audience through a process of envisioning the potential long-term benefits from strategic planning for the EMB to set a common vision based on well-defined goals and strategies.
- Ensure the EMB can realistically consider and appreciate the amount of resources needed for adoption and implementation of the strategic planning process. This includes time (executive management, department managers and key staff), financial resources and the use of other EMB assets.

- Reflect on what would be the best timing, at the current stage of the electoral cycle, for the EMB to engage in a long-range strategic planning effort and what overall duration should be envisaged for such an effort.
- Conduct a wrap-up discussion to help determine whether there is a general agreement that strategic planning is appropriate for the EMB.

## PREPARE THE STRATEGIC PLANNING BRIEF

If the EMB is in agreement, the strategic planning expert should conclude the induction meeting by assisting the Strategic Planning Committee to draft the Strategic Planning Brief. This document formally expresses the EMB's long-term institutional commitment to undertake a multi-year strategic planning process. It also briefly defines the main actions/activities to be implemented for initiating this process.

## ENDORSE THE STRATEGIC PLANNING BRIEF

Once finalized, the Strategic Planning Brief should be formally endorsed by the EMB's executive management and broadly circulated internally and externally, among key stakeholders. This document represents the basis for the strategic planning process. It summarizes why the EMB is engaging in a strategic planning process, how it will implement this process, how long it will last, who will be involved and the expected results.

## COMMUNICATE THE EMB'S COMMITMENT INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

Once formally endorsed, the commitment of the EMB to the multi-year strategic planning process must be communicated and disseminated, internally and externally, among its stakeholders:

**Internally.** The Brief should communicate the decision to the EMB's local branch offices at the subsidiary levels (regional, provincial and/or municipal) and explain in broad terms what this decision entails in terms of directional change and how it will affect the work and involvement of local branch offices.

**Externally.** The commitment of the EMB to a multi-year strategic planning process, as expressed in the Brief, should be disseminated widely via press releases, interviews, news articles in print and electronic media, press conferences, social media, etc.

## **CONDUCT A STRATEGIC PLANNING CYCLE REVIEW**

As mentioned earlier, if the EMB is familiar with strategic planning methodologies, or if a Strategic Planning Cycle has just been completed, the envisioning step may be omitted. The EMB can conduct a thorough Strategic Planning Cycle review to assess key lessons learned during the implementation of the concluding cycle and apply them to the next cycle.

A Strategic Planning Cycle Review is a tool to assess the adequacy (or inadequacy) of various steps of a full Strategic Planning Cycle. A Strategic Planning Cycle Review allows the EMB to assess what worked well, what did not and why during the implementation of these steps.

This assessment covers every aspect of the cycle, including activities, processes, management issues and implementation capabilities. This review is more effective when based on direct experiences of those who were involved in the EMB's strategic planning exercise, and is not simply an examination of the various documented outputs this exercise produced. The review should also make suitable remedial recommendations to be fed into the design, planning and execution of the next Strategic Planning Cycle that the EMB is going to undertake.

STEP 0:  
ENVISION

**STEP 1:  
PLAN**

STEP 2:  
DEFINE

STEP 3:  
ASSESS

STEP 4:  
IDENTIFY

STEP 5:  
CONSULT

STEP 6:  
STRATEGIZE

STEP 7:  
DEPLOY

STEP 8:  
EXECUTE

## STEP 1 - PLAN: PLANNING THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

This step outlines the required initial planning activities, preparatory actions and key decisions for planning and organizing the sessions that will be conducted throughout each step of the Strategic Planning Cycle.

### Output of Step 1:

*Plan. Strategic Planning Master Plan*

After the EMB's commitment to the strategic planning process has been formally expressed and endorsed through the Brief, the EMB is ready to begin strategic planning. It will need to perform a number of pre-planning tasks to pave the way for an organized and efficient process.

This step is based on a number of formal decisions to be taken by the EMB's executive management. Their first action is to assign clear roles and responsibilities for every staff person who is going to be directly and closely involved in the implementation of the strategic planning process, by establishing the:

**Strategic Planning Committee.** This Committee reports directly to the EMB's Executive Management and has the responsibility of developing the overall strategic direction for the EMB. It also:

- Analyzes documents
- Provides recommendations, consistent with the Strategic Plan, to the Executive Management

- Has the responsibility of developing the overall strategic direction for the EMB
- Monitors progress
- Reviews results

**Core Team.** This Team is a smaller group whose members are selected from among the members of the Strategic Planning Committee and has the responsibility of providing administrative, logistical and operational support to the Strategic Planning Committee throughout implementation of the cycle.

The role of the EMB's executive management in the strategic planning process is of governance and oversight. As the group responsible for its management and governance, the EMB's executive management should focus on the ultimate and overarching goals and strategies necessary to achieve a successful strategic planning process. Therefore, all executive management should stay closely involved in the entire process.

For the strategic planning process to be a realistic and successful exercise, the executive management of the EMB should formally endorse the main outputs (documents) produced and adopt the resulting Strategic Plan as the organizational framework around which the EMB will originate its Implementation Plan.

The Strategic Planning Committee, with support from the Core Team, should produce the Strategic Planning Master Plan. It is a comprehensive document which identifies the reasons for planning, the main activities,



issues to address, how the process will unfold, what activities are needed, the timeframe for each and who is responsible.

## Activities for Step 1:

- Establish the Strategic Planning Committee
- Establish the Core Team
- Select a Facilitator
- Plan the Details
- Develop the Strategic Planning Master Plan
- Make Logical Arrangements
- Set Ground Rules for the Strategic Planning Sessions

## ESTABLISH THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The strategic planning process should be led and implemented by a planning team. Therefore, the very first step is to establish a Strategic Planning Committee to implement the planning process. The strategic planning exercise should be as inclusive as possible. Hence, in establishing the Strategic Planning Committee, the EMB's executive management should carefully select which staff, within the EMB's structure, should be involved.

An inclusive strategic planning process creates uniformity of purpose, develops a common direction and ensures objectivity in the process. It also helps build staff commitment to the EMB and its strategies. If they are directly involved in the process

of setting strategic objectives of the EMB, individuals will take ownership of the goals and efforts needed to meet these objectives.

An inclusive strategic planning process means that staff within the EMB who will not be directly involved in the process should be kept informed about the decisions made by those who are involved. This measure ensures realism, understanding and ownership of the plan; it encourages all levels of the EMB to adopt the set vision and goals; it involves the EMB's staff in defining its strategic direction; and, importantly, it aligns individual visions into a single collective vision for the EMB.

The strategic planning process must be representative, too. Unless the EMB is very small, not everyone in the EMB can participate in strategic planning sessions. These sessions need to be focused and organized. Consensus on key strategic decisions among those participating should be reached as quickly and smoothly as possible. Therefore, the Strategic Planning Committee should be a representative group identified by the EMB's executive management.

Members of the Strategic Planning Committee have to be carefully selected. They should possess the requisite capacities and knowledge to engage in a strategic planning process and be able to maintain commitment to the process. Their ability to devote significant time to the planning effort is vital. It may become necessary for executive management to reduce the regular workloads or responsibilities of staff playing a key role in the Strategic Planning Committee. The contribution of different types and levels

of EMB staff will be needed throughout the planning process. For example, the executive management's representation in the Strategic Planning Committee is a key factor in determining strategic direction (definition of mission, vision and guiding principles). Department managers, however, are strongly needed when performing the EMB's organizational analysis to determine its current status and, later, in defining and implementing the strategies required to meet the goals set by the organization.

This means ensuring a hierarchical and functional diversity in the composition of the Strategic Planning Committee provides the EMB with greater flexibility and a much wider angle in the implementation of the strategic planning process. This helps the EMB's executive management understand the daily operational issues of the organization and helps staff understand top-level issues of the organization. EMB staff can identify problems and raise critical questions about issues on which the executive management might only make assumptions – and vice versa.

In most cases, the Strategic Planning Committee should be a manageable size, normally not exceeding 20 persons (however, the number should be in line with the size of the organization) and including an appropriate combination of the following individuals and groups:

### **Members of the EMB's Executive Management.**

Those leading the EMB have a long-range vision of what and where the organization can realistically be in three to five years. Representation of this group in the Strategic Planning Committee ensures close involvement in the process of those

who have the authority to make strategic decisions; for example, to decide which goals will be achieved and how.

**EMB Department Managers.** Managers of various EMB departments who can realistically determine the availability of current organizational (human and financial) resources and the level at which they can support the strategic planning process. Consideration should be given on how to involve senior staff from the EMB's subsidiary branches at the local level.

### **Members of the Strategic Planning Committee.**

Should include those EMB Managers who have experience and knowledge about critical factors relating to the EMB, such as:

- Institutional setting of the EMB (structure, size, composition, assets, etc.)
- Financial and human resources available for commitment to the strategic planning process
- Legal framework of elections (EMB's function, mandate, election procedures)
- Key administrative areas
- Operational issues (voter registration, voter education, training, etc.)
- Public relations (how the EMB is perceived externally, status of the EMB's relationship with external stakeholders, issues of credibility)

**Support staff.** Support staff should also be involved, as they can assist in administrative and logistical aspects relating to the process, including arranging meetings, recording key information, assisting with flipcharts, monitoring the status of work, ensuring timely follow-up actions by others, etc.

### **Representatives of external stakeholders.**

External stakeholders who have an interest in the success of the EMB should be included to give an “outsider’s” perspective on any issues. External resource persons can educate the EMB and staff on the perception of the organization in the country and identify relevant areas and issues not addressed by the planning session.

This group might include former commissioners and other senior staff from the EMB or other external resource individuals who enjoy the respect of the EMB; serve as institutional memory; and can provide an unbiased view of whether the set of goals and strategies envisaged by the EMB’s staff are realistic.

## **ESTABLISH THE CORE TEAM**

Once the Strategic Planning Committee is formed, it is necessary to establish a Core Team. The Strategic Planning Committee can select members of the Core Team from among its staff. The Core Team is not responsible for carrying out all the work. It should provide administrative, logistical and operational support to the Strategic Planning Committee. Support from the Core Team maintains the efficiency of the process and ensures all tasks are achieved efficiently and in a timely manner.

The Core Team is the “backbone” of the strategic planning process. It creates the necessary planning documents; distributes pre-session reading materials; selects breakout groups; conducts organizational assessments; prioritizes or narrows information for the Strategic Planning Committee to discuss and evaluate; assists with the process; and prepares the documented outputs produced through the implementation of the strategic planning process.

The size of the Core Team should be kept relatively small; however, this depends on the size of the EMB. Normally, the Core Team should consist of a minimum of three members to a maximum of six members.

The Strategic Planning Committee should then select a Coordinator for the Core Team. This person should be a senior member of the EMB staff who has the necessary stature and decision-making power to lead and support the strategic planning process in the long term. The Coordinator has the overall responsibility for holding well-organized and focused strategic planning sessions.

After appointing the Coordinator, the Strategic Planning Committee should assign clear roles for other members of the Core Team. Roles should be defined for those persons who will:

- Gather key information to the process
- Be responsible for providing administrative and logistical support to the process
- Draft and review written documents

- Seek and obtain the formal endorsement by executive management of the various documents produced at each strategic step of the planning process

## SELECT A FACILITATOR

After assigning specific roles, a facilitator should be identified. The selection of a skilled facilitator is one of the most important decisions in the entire strategic planning process. Preferably, the facilitator should be external to the organization to provide third-party credibility.

Effective facilitation techniques ensure the strategic planning process is highly effective and focused. A skilled facilitator can help the Strategic Planning Committee deal with a problem or develop a plan for delivering results smoothly and in less time than without this professional expertise. He or she should also be able to build consensus when there is a difference of opinion. The ability to balance the discussion based on a thorough understanding of the situation is extremely important. It is imperative that the facilitator has excellent communication and diplomatic skills and is able to use the right kind of tools according to the situation.

The facilitator has a key role in strategic planning and a number of important tasks to perform. These include:

- Assisting the Core Team in implementing various steps of the Strategic Planning Cycle
- Capturing and analyzing key input from the audience to move a discussion forward

- Recognizing group dynamics, remaining neutral, accommodating different approaches, building consensus and managing difficult audiences

- Keeping the discussions focused and within the allotted time
- Energizing discussions when needed
- Summarizing the essence of discussions at the end of the day
- Assigning tasks, with the Coordinator, to the various members of the Core Team

Relying on a facilitator who does not possess strong facilitation skills, an adequate understanding of strategic planning issues and familiarity with this methodology could undermine the whole strategic planning exercise.

An experienced facilitator might be found at an academic institution, in the development field, in the business management sector or in a government's public administration department.

Observation has shown that most EMBs may not have an experienced facilitator available from within their existing staff.

The Strategic Planning Committee may want to consider using an external facilitator (usually a national from the country in which the EMB is located) if:

- The EMB has never conducted strategic planning before

- No staff in the organization possesses sufficient or suitable facilitation skills
- There is need for unbiased facilitation by an external person who does not have strong predispositions about the EMB's strategic issues and plans
- Steps to follow and methodology to employ to develop the Strategic Plan
- What is expected to be accomplished, by whom and by when
- Agenda of the first strategic planning session to define the EMB's mission, vision and guiding principles (to be implemented in the next step)
- Methodology to be used to conduct the EMB's external and internal organizational assessments
- Ground rules for the various strategic planning sessions

This Guide has been written to empower staff from within the EMB who already possess strong facilitation skills to facilitate the entire strategic planning process. A senior member of the EMB's staff, or an experienced trainer, could play the role of facilitator.

Alternatively, strategic planning training for facilitators and general expertise on this methodology might be offered by an international organization providing electoral assistance.

## DEVELOP THE STRATEGIC PLANNING MASTER PLAN

Implementing a full Strategic Planning Cycle requires a number of strategic sessions to be regularly planned, organized and facilitated. It is important, therefore, that the initial planning meetings are well organized. This will help ensure that strategic planning sessions develop an effective and realistic Strategic Plan.

Assuming the facilitator is already experienced or already trained, the Core Team should plan the details and necessary steps for implementing the entire strategic planning exercise. This should be reflected in the Strategic Planning Master Plan. When defining basic elements to be included in the Strategic Planning Master Plan, the Core Team should consider:

When selecting the venue for strategic planning sessions, it is important that it be located outside the EMB's regular

## MAKE LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

Once the Strategic Planning Master Plan is completed, the Core Team is expected to do the following before every strategic planning session:

- Select the appropriate venue for the sessions
- Set the dates for the sessions
- Inform everyone about these decisions
- Arrange for supplies, equipment, transportation, etc.
- Prepare and distribute read-ahead documents to participants in the exercises

office. This allows session participants to concentrate on their tasks and not be distracted by day-to-day operations. The Core Team should consider both a meeting room for plenary sessions and “breakout” rooms, particularly if the group is large.

## **SET GROUND RULES FOR THE STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSIONS**

The Core Team, assisted by the Facilitator, establishes a set of ground rules for the strategic planning sessions. Ground rules ensure the sessions are focused, keeps the discussion open and ideas flowing. At the opening of each session, the Facilitator should lead a discussion on the ground rules, explain why these simple rules are in place, take recommendations for additions and obtain the participants’ consensus on the set of ground rules. It is helpful to have them displayed on flip chart paper visible to everyone.

A sample set of ground rules is provided below:

- Operate in the here and now – no distracting “war” stories
- Everyone has equal importance when it comes to ideas
- Respect each member of the group
- Participate without side conversations
- Confront challenges and obstacles, not each other
- Ensure that discussions make effective use of time

Once a facilitator is identified (and trained, if needed); the venue for the strategic Planning Sessions has been found; all administrative and logistics details have been worked out, the agenda has been developed and ground rules are set and agreed upon; and the Strategic Planning Master Plan has been completed, it is time to move to the implementation of the first strategic planning session.

## STEP 2 - DEFINE: DEFINING THE STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS OF THE EMB

This step takes the EMB through one of the primary purposes for long-term strategic planning.

### Output of Step 2:

*Define.* Strategic Foundations Document

This step defines – or simply re-affirms (if already existing) – a common understanding among staff of why the EMB exists and where, as an organization, it aspires to be in three to five years.

Defining an EMB's Strategic Foundations is the most effective way to concisely reach and express this common understanding. The Strategic Foundations of the EMB consist of the following elements:

**Mission statement.** Defines the purpose of the EMB, describes what it does, whom it does it for, why it does it and how.

**Vision statement.** An idealized view of what the EMB aspires to be in the future.

**Guiding principles.** Values and philosophy that shape the actions of the EMB and its staff.

The expected output to be produced at the conclusion of this step is the Strategic Foundations Document. It should be endorsed by the EMB's executive management.

The Strategic Foundations Document represents the first of the three key strategic outputs comprising the EMB's final Strategic Plan.

### Activities for Step 2:

- Conduct the first planning session
- Define the EMB's Mission Statement
- Define the EMB's Vision Statement
- Define the EMB's Guiding Principles
- Develop the Strategic Foundations Document
- Endorse the Strategic Foundations Document

## CONDUCT THE FIRST STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION

The Core Team's Coordinator should open the first strategic planning session, welcome the members of the Strategic Planning Committee and introduce anyone who is not known to the other participants. The Coordinator should also introduce those members of executive management who are present and allow them, if they wish, to make opening remarks. This provides an opportunity for the executive management of the EMB to express (or reaffirm) their personal – and the EMB's institutional – commitment to the strategic planning process.

During the initial session, the Facilitator provides an overview of the steps and activities of the strategic planning process. The Facilitator walks the audience through

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the stages of the Strategic Planning Master Plan, discusses the definition and the purpose of strategic planning, reviews outcomes and benefits from strategic planning and the changes this methodology might have on the EMB's operations.

The Facilitator should emphasize that strategic planning is a long-term process and not a one-off event; stressing the fact that, to be effective, this process of transformation takes time, which is why strategic planning management normally encompasses a three to five year period.

The strategic planning overview should also contain:

- An explanation of the strategic planning methodology. It should describe the Strategic Planning Cycle concept and the sequential steps with an explanation

of what each step is expected to achieve and what output (or outputs) is expected.

- A definition, in the simplest terms, of the main terms in strategic planning. This includes the vision, mission, guiding principles, strategic pillars, strategic goals and measurable objectives. Hand-outs with samples of such definitions taken from actual strategic plans produced by other EMBs<sup>8</sup> should be provided. These terms can be discussed in detail, since each term is going to be developed during upcoming sessions.

Figure 9 provides sample descriptions of potential strategic elements to help clarify the terminology used in describing implementation steps of the Strategic Planning Cycle:

Figure 9: Summary of Key Concepts

STRATEGIC ELEMENT	DEFINITION	SAMPLE DEFINITION OF EMB STRATEGIC ELEMENTS
<b>Mission statement</b>	The purpose of the organization, describing what it does, why it does it, for whom and how.	Our mission is to guarantee the democratic voting rights of the electors, assist in making the finances of political interests transparent and ensure efficient, cost-effective and non-partisan administration of the electoral process.
<b>Vision statement</b>	An idealized view of what kind of organization it envisages being in the future.	Our vision of the Electoral Commission in the future is that of an independent, credible and well-resourced institution which promotes democracy and good governance by continually administering elections in such a manner that the results are acceptable to all.

8 See Annex for sample materials...



Figure 9 Continued: Summary of Key Concepts

STRATEGIC ELEMENT	DEFINITION	SAMPLE DEFINITION OF EMB STRATEGIC ELEMENTS	
<p><b>Guiding principles</b></p>	<p>Values and the philosophy shaping the actions of the organization and of its people.</p>	<p>Our values reflect the behaviors that the people of our Country expect of us. That is, we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct our business with fairness and impartiality</li> <li>▪ Maintain high standards of integrity and ethical behavior</li> <li>▪ Respect and uphold the law</li> <li>▪ Are open, transparent and accountable for what we do</li> <li>▪ Respect and listen to our clients and stakeholders and each other</li> <li>▪ Serve our people and the Parliament</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Strategic pillar</b></p>	<p>Key strategic area whose fulfillment will enable the accomplishment of the overall strategy of the organization.</p>	1.	Voter participation in the electoral process
		2.	Voter registration and voter register
		3.	Professional development of EMB staff
<p><b>Strategic goal</b></p>	<p>Changes required to move the organization from where it currently stands (the <i>present</i>) towards where it desires to be (the <i>future</i>).</p>	1.1	Increase voter awareness (all below relate to Strategic Pillar 1 above)
		1.2	Simplify voting eligibility requirements
		1.3	Optimize voting procedures
		1.4	Improve voters' access to polling stations

As a first task, the Facilitator should lead the group through a brainstorming session to identify these key elements: what the EMB serves, to whom, how and why. When this list is complete, the Strategic Planning Committee is ready to start drafting the EMB's mission statement, vision and guiding principles.

If the Strategic Planning Committee group is large, the Facilitator should divide them into three smaller groups, each with the same number of participants:

- Group One can develop the EMB's mission statement
- Group Two can develop the EMB's vision statement
- Group Three can develop the EMB's guiding principles

The three groups should reflect a balanced combination of roles among the EMB staff attending the session, if possible. Representatives from the EMB's executive management should be alongside local staff from its subsidiary branches, for example.

Each group should assign, from among its members, the following roles: a facilitator, a note taker and someone to report back the group's work to the plenary. During the plenary there will be further discussion and group input on the strategic elements produced at the session's end.

Participants should rotate these roles during the working sessions that follow.

## DEFINE THE EMB'S MISSION STATEMENT

An effective mission statement must communicate concisely, in a few sentences, the essence of the EMB to its stakeholders and to the public. Before starting to work on the mission statement, the Facilitator should lead a brief introductory session clarifying what a mission statement is and what is considered during its development. This introductory session (for defining the vision statement and guiding principles) should be done in a plenary session before dividing the large group into the smaller groups, if division is needed.

Normally, EMBs already have a mission clearly expressed by the legal framework of the elections (e.g., the national constitution and/or the electoral law). However, the legal framework may not always convey the essence of how the EMB perceives itself. It is important the mission statement reflects one guiding set of ideas and is easily understood and supported by the EMB's political stakeholders, the public, EMB staff, government leaders, civil society representatives and international partners.

When developing a mission statement, Group One should reflect on the following questions:

- Who are we?
- What do we do?
- For whom do we do it?
- Why do we do it?
- Why are public resources devoted to this effort?

A mission statement should include three basic concepts, summarized as follows:

**Purpose of the EMB.** A clear statement of what the EMB seeks to accomplish; why the EMB exists; and what is the ultimate result of its work.

**What the EMB does.** An outline of the activities or programs the EMB implements to attain its purpose.

**What guides the EMB.** The values the EMB's members hold in common and attempt to put into practice. The values are principles that guide the EMB's members in performing their mandated functions.

Therefore, a well-expressed mission statement should:

- Identify and reinforce the overall purpose for the existence of the EMB as established in the legal framework of the elections
- Identify the basic needs or particular functions the EMB is mandated to perform
- Define the EMB's stakeholders, users, activities and sub-activities
- Help identify public and political stakeholders' expectations and requirements; how the EMB meets these expectations and requirements; and what processes and resources are used to satisfy these requirements

- Lead to the development of performance measures that reflect public and political stakeholder requirements

A sample mission statement: "Our mission is to guarantee the democratic voting rights of our electors, assist in making the finances of political interests transparent and to ensure efficient, cost effective and non-partisan administration of the electoral process."<sup>9</sup>

## DEFINE THE EMB'S VISION STATEMENT

As described earlier in this Guide, EMBs constantly confront the challenge of delivering services with greater efficiency, effectiveness and quality. Yet, they often operate within resource constraints and in highly charged political environments. Creating a vision statement can help the EMB reflect on and redefine how its mandated functions are fulfilled. This allows the EMB to anticipate and meet the demands that it will encounter in the future.

When developing the EMB's vision statement, Group Two should reflect on the following questions:

- What does the EMB want and what are its aspirations?
- How does the EMB wish to be known and perceived by the public, political stakeholders and its staff?
- How will the EMB enhance the quality of democracy for those whom it serves?

<sup>9</sup> Additional samples of mission statements developed by existing EMBs can be found in the Annex.

A well-expressed vision statement should:

- Be brief and memorable
- Be inspiring and challenging
- Describe the ideal
- Appeal to EMB staff, the public and political stakeholders
- Describe future service levels
- Be enduring

The vision statement should ultimately convey a shared, supported, detailed and comprehensive message; it should be positive and inspiring. A basic truism is that the EMB will never be greater than the vision that guides it.

The vision statement should require the EMB's staff to increase their expectations and aspirations and enhance their performance. The statement should be appropriate, ambitious, realistic, credible, well articulated and easy to understand. It should illustrate what a successful EMB looks like. It is the pursuit of that vision of success that should motivate EMB staff to work together. In short, the vision should simultaneously challenge and inspire the EMB to achieve its mission.

The Facilitator for Group Two should help its members to discuss these concepts, in search of areas of agreement and dissent and to allow innovative ideas to emerge. The Facilitator should assist the group in drafting a statement and pushing the discussion until the group has produced

something on which the group, the Strategic Planning Committee and EMB's Executive Management can all agree.

Sample vision statement: "Our vision of the Electoral Commission in the future is that of an independent, credible and well-resourced institution which promotes democracy and good governance by continually administering elections in such a manner that the results are acceptable to all."<sup>10</sup>

## DEFINE THE EMB'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding principles are the moral characteristics that reflect the values of the EMB. They are a set of concise statements describing how EMB staff members relate to each other and to those they serve. In strategic planning, all organizations develop values, beliefs and attitudes that guide their behavior. In many cases, they are not obvious, but they do exist. They are part of the organization's culture, and in this case, of the EMB's mandated functions.

Describing the EMB's guiding principles could be a difficult task. Principles reflect the values and philosophy of executive management and should be compatible with internal and external stakeholders, including the public. Principles could be expressed in terms of responsibilities to the public, political stakeholders and EMB staff, or they could be expressed in terms of quality or excellence in the management and delivery of EMB services.

The most effective statements of principles are those that succeed in expressing the EMB's attitude about:

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<sup>10</sup> Note: Additional samples of vision statements developed by existing EMBs can be found in the Annex.

**People.** The way EMB staff, stakeholders and the general public are treated.

**Processes.** The way the EMB is managed, decisions are made and services provided.

**Performance.** Internal and external expectations concerning the EMB's responsibilities and quality of services provided.

The Facilitator should spend some time discussing the implications of the chosen guiding principles on the day-to-day behavior of the EMB. Group Three should understand the implications and be willing to formally commit to the guiding principles before they are finally adopted.

If the EMB's executive management formally adopts a set of guiding principles establishing a certain philosophy and neither the executive management nor EMB staff put that philosophy into practice, the EMB will seriously lose credibility internally, within key constituencies, and externally, among political stakeholders and the general public.

Sample guiding principles could be: "Our values reflect the behaviors that our people expect of us. That is, we: conduct our work with fairness and impartiality; maintain high standards of integrity and ethical behavior; respect and uphold the law; are open, transparent and accountable for what we do; respect and listen to our clients and stakeholders and each other; and serve our people and the Parliament."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Note: Additional samples of guiding principles developed by existing EMBs can be found in the "Samples" section at the end of this Guide.

## DEVELOP THE STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS DOCUMENT

Once the Strategic Planning Committee reaches an agreement on the definition of the Strategic Foundations of the EMB, the Core Team can draft these statements and aggregate and reflect them in the output of this step, the Strategic Foundations Document.

## ENDORSE THE STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS DOCUMENT

Once finalized, the Strategic Foundations Document should be formally endorsed by the EMB's executive management and effectively communicated across all levels of the EMB.

This document represents the future status of the EMB and is the first of three key strategic outputs comprising the EMB's final Strategic Plan.

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## STEP 3 - ASSESS: CONDUCTING THE ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENTS AND THE SWOT ANALYSIS

Once the EMB has developed and endorsed its vision, mission and guiding principles statements, it has achieved a clear idea of where it aspires to be (future status). Step 3 allows the EMB to understand where it is now (current status).

### Output of Step 3:

Assess. Organizational  
Appraisal

Step 3 is a process of self-examination involving a systematic assessment of the internal status of the EMB and the external environment in which it operates. This is needed so that, in Step 4, the EMB can define required actions to fill the gap between its future and its current status.

In strategic planning, the current status of an organization can be determined through the implementation of two activities:

**Organizational assessment.** A basic strategic assessment methodology that provides the EMB with an analysis and evaluation of internal conditions and external data and factors that affect its performance.

**SWOT<sup>12</sup> Analysis.** A management tool that attempts to match internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization with external opportunities and threats.

Through the organizational assessment, the EMB gets a baseline assessment of its performance and an evaluation of its internal needs and assets. It also gains a better understanding of how the organization relates to its external environment. The data, information and trends identified during the internal and external organizational assessment provide the basis for the next activity, the SWOT Analysis.

Through a SWOT Analysis, the EMB is assisted in the process of rationally categorizing external and internal information from the organizational assessment into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

These assessments are necessary to help identify strategic or critical issues the EMB has to address in order to fill the gap between where it aspires to be and where it is now. The identification of these issues, performed through a Gap Analysis, form the basis of the Organizational Appraisal, the output of this step.

### Activities for Step 3:

- Plan the Organizational Assessments
- Conduct the Internal Organizational Assessments
- Conduct the External Organizational Assessments
- Categorize and Summarize the Information Gathered
- Conduct the SWOT Analysis
- Develop the EMB Organizational Appraisal

<sup>12</sup> SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

## PLAN THE ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

It is important that the organizational assessment process is planned and structured to meet the needs and culture of the EMB. It should also fit within the timeframe envisaged for the strategic planning process.

In planning organizational assessments, the Core Team must:

**Define scope and breadth of assessments.** This means defining what key components need to be examined, ensuring any critical internal and external issues are not missed.

**Establish a well-thought-out analytic framework.** This ensures an adequate basis for analyzing gathered data, categorizing data and summarizing the findings.

**Assign individual responsibilities.** The Coordinator will need to assign members of the Core Team the various tasks to be executed to perform the assessments.

**Plan the process in detail.** This means the Core Team should plan all necessary activities, timetable and method/s through which data will be collected. A combination of different methods can be used to perform the EMB's internal and external organizational assessments. Depending on the number of people involved, the Core Team can perform individual or small group interviews, brainstorming meetings, and/or a survey.

**Gather information.** This involves identifying all possible sources from which the Core Team obtains essential information for

analysis. Possible sources for collecting internal assessment information include:

- The country's legal electoral framework
- EMB reports
- Election reports
- Public opinion polls
- Internal assessments of operations
- Election observer reports
- Technical assessments
- Project documents from international electoral assistance providers
- Minutes of internal EMB meetings
- EMB databases
- Budget requests
- Staff surveys
- Internal audits
- Planning documents of the EMB

Possible sources for collecting external assessment information include:

- Statistical reports
- Reports from the international community
- The country's legislation
- Census reports

- Decisions and actions of the competent body (or bodies) on electoral dispute resolution
- Policy statements by the EMB's stakeholders
- Reports of interest and advocacy groups
- Materials from the media (broadcast and print)

**Decide who is going to be involved.** In addition to members of the Strategic Planning Committee, the Core Team should consider involving a wider number of internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are EMB staff working at the central office and in local branch offices. External stakeholders could vary extensively: political analysts, academics, government representatives, members of political parties and civil society organizations, among others. The Core Team should decide how wide the reach of the organizational assessments will be, since these assessments have to be tailored to fit the EMB's goals, resources, needs and constraints.

**Inform everyone.** Once key decisions are made, the Core Team informs the EMB's Executive Management, the Strategic Planning Committee, internal stakeholders (e.g., the EMB staff) and anyone else involved in the assessment process. This could be done in a number of ways; for example, by organizing informative sessions, sending written memos and instructions, and electronic communications.

**Clarify.** The process will be more effective if all participants have a clear idea of what to expect and how the process will take

place. Key issues, such as the scope of the process; the methodology to be employed; who is involved; the timeframe that has been established; the confidentiality of gathered data; and how assessment findings will be analyzed and summarized, should be understood by all stakeholders. This is especially important for those who may not have been part of a strategic planning exercise before.

### **Analyze, categorize and summarize findings.**

Once the information from the organizational assessments has been gathered, the Core Team should analyze and categorize it. The findings from the assessments are then summarized through the conduct of the SWOT Analysis.

## **CONDUCT THE INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT**

The internal analysis considers the situation internal to the EMB. The framework of the internal organizational assessment, therefore, should facilitate an examination of critical key internal components, for the effective functioning and performance of the EMB. Key components to be examined through the internal assessment might vary from EMB to EMB. Typically, they include, but are not limited to, the following:

- EMB's governance and leadership
- Culture, image and organizational structure
- Legal mandate
- Staff
- Operational efficiency



- Operational capacity
- Performance of mandated functions and impact
- Relationships with key stakeholders
- Budget and funding sources

Below is a list of sample questions to ask when conducting the internal organizational assessment, regardless of the method employed. The questions are not inclusive, since each EMB should tailor the questions to fit its specific conditions and reality.

- What is the main function or mission of the EMB?
- Who are the people, including organizations and institutions, the EMB serves?
- What are the key services the EMB provides?
- Where will the EMB be in the future (its vision)? Will its services or mission change?
- What are the principles or moral characteristics that should guide the EMB to attain the vision of its future? What current behavior within the EMB needs to be changed to attain this vision?
- How must the EMB change or evolve in order to realize this future vision? What are the barriers to change (political, administrative, financial, cultural, social, etc.)?
- Which major functions or processes of the EMB should be targets for improvement to better serve the people, institutions and organizations the EMB serves?
- How do the financial resources available to the EMB affect its ability to meet its mission? What would be the effect of reduced resources? What needs to be done to ensure the EMB's core functions or mission continue to be performed well?
- Are planning, budget and other management efforts integrated?
- If just one thing could be changed to improve our EMB, what would that change be?
- What are the capabilities of EMB staff?
- Are there any operations (voter registration, voter education, training, etc.) that the EMB administers effectively?
- How successfully are our citizens' needs in these areas being met?
- What are the constraints in meeting our citizens' needs and expectations?
- How are the needs and expectations of EMB's key stakeholders changing? What opportunities exist for positive change? Do the EMB's plans accommodate the changes?
- What is the EMB's reputation in the country? What is the public perception of the way the EMB performs its functions?

- Are the EMB's planning, management, information, communication and financial systems in place adequate? How can they be improved?
- Are EMB's infrastructure, assets and equipment adequate? How can they be improved?
- What are your expectations about the strategic planning session? What concerns do you have?
- What additional questions should we have asked you about the EMB and/or the strategic planning session?
- What forces (political, economic, traditional, cultural, etc.) might affect key elements of the EMB's working environment?
- What implications do these forces hold for the EMB in the future? What are the most likely scenarios for the future?

## **CATEGORIZE AND SUMMARIZE THE INFORMATION GATHERED**

Upon completion of internal and external organizational assessments, the Core Team has collected sufficient data and information so the Strategic Planning Committee can undertake informed discussions and draw key assumptions needed to determine the current status of the EMB.

The Core Team should organize and distill the information collected through the assessments in a format for easy access and reference, especially if there is a large amount of data. Before it can be used for a SWOT Analysis, the information must be categorized.

One way to categorize the information is to follow the same structure of the assessment framework used to collect it. Once this work is complete, the Core Team can use the SWOT Analysis to summarize the findings of the organizational assessments.

## **CONDUCT THE EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT**

Because external factors often severely impact operations and perceptions of the EMB, the external organizational assessment of the EMB is a critical step in the strategic planning process.

Multiple external factors may influence an EMB and its mission. Below is a list of sample questions that might be asked when conducting the external organizational assessment, regardless of other methods employed:

- What external factors affect the EMB?
- What are the current issues or problems? Are these local, regional, national or global in scope? Why are the issues important?
- What are the nation's future revenue and expenditure estimates for the next five years?

## **CONDUCT THE SWOT ANALYSIS**

The Strategic Planning Committee should perform a rigorous assessment of the EMB's internal strengths and weaknesses. The external environment, manifested in potential opportunities and threats the EMB may face in the future, should also be assessed.

Figure 10: SWOT Analysis

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
I N T E R N A L	E X T E R N A L

In defining strengths, the following questions should be asked and answered:

- What does the EMB do exceptionally well?
- What advantages does it have?
- What valuable assets and resources does the EMB have?
- What do staff members identify as the EMB's strengths?
- What do stakeholders identify as the EMB's strengths?

The information originating from the internal and external organizational assessments offers valuable insights to the EMB. It provides a realistic analysis of:

- Its internal environment, by identifying internal organizational strengths and weaknesses that affect the EMB's current and potential performance
- Its external environment, by identifying opportunities and threats presented by external forces that affect the operating environment in which the EMB functions

The SWOT Analysis (Fig. 10) matrix provides a user-friendly way to identify the EMB's strengths and weaknesses and examine its opportunities and threats.

The SWOT Analysis is usually conducted in a group session and involves defining:

**Strengths.** Internal, positive attributes, both tangible and intangible, within the EMB's control.

**Weaknesses.** internal negative factors within the EMB's control. These factors, for a variety of reasons, are areas of improvement for the EMB to effectively perform its mandated functions. Possible weaknesses might include lack of expertise, limited resources, limited access to skills and knowledge or the use of inappropriate technology. The more accurately and honestly weaknesses are identified, the more valuable the SWOT (Fig. 10) will be for the assessment.

In defining weaknesses, the following questions should be asked and answered:

- What could the EMB do better? Which areas might we improve?
- What is the EMB criticized for or receive complaints about?
- Where is the EMB vulnerable?

**Opportunities.** External factors that represent reasons for the EMB to improve its performance. These opportunities reflect the

potential the EMB can attain by implementing its strategies. Any identified opportunity internal to the EMB and within its control should be categorized as a strength.

In defining opportunities, the following questions should be asked and answered:

- What opportunities exist in the external environment from which the EMB could benefit, but has not been able to address?
- Are there any emerging trends on which the EMB can capitalize?

**Threats.** External challenges created by an unfavorable trend or development that is beyond the EMB's control and could place its strategy or performance at risk. Threats can be addressed through strategic actions if they should occur. When identifying threats, it may be useful to categorize them according to their gravity and probability of occurrence.

The better the EMB is at identifying potential threats, the more likely it will be able to position itself to proactively plan for and respond to them.

In defining threats, the following questions should be asked and answered:

- Are any of the EMB's weaknesses likely to make it critically vulnerable?
- What external challenges exist that affect the EMB's progress?
- Are financial, political, procedural or other conditions affecting the EMB's performance?

## DEVELOP THE EMB ORGANIZATIONAL APPRAISAL

Once the Strategic Planning Committee completes the SWOT Analysis characterizing the internal and external operating environment, the Core Team should gather all findings in the output for this step, the Organizational Appraisal.

This Organizational Appraisal establishes the current status, or position, of the EMB. This document usually includes an introduction that states the purpose of the analysis and methods used to complete it. It also illustrates the various strategic and critical issues the EMB has to address in order to fill the gap between the current situation and its aspired future.

## STEP 4 - IDENTIFY: IDENTIFYING THE EMB'S STRATEGIC PILLARS AND ESTABLISHING THE STRATEGIC GOALS

Once the current situation is assessed (Step 3) and the aspirational future identified (Step 2), the Strategic Planning Committee can begin defining the course of action to bridge these two points.

### Output of Step 4:

*Identify. Draft Strategy into Action Plan*

This step helps the Strategic Planning Committee determine what needs to happen (the EMB's strategy) in order to fill the gap between the EMB's current status and its vision for the future.

To achieve this task, the Strategic Planning Committee must conduct a Gap Analysis. This exercise identifies two key elements of the EMB's strategy: strategic pillars and strategic goals.

The expected output is the draft version of the EMB's Strategy into Action Plan. This Plan represents the strategy of the EMB and should be formally endorsed by the EMB's executive management upon completion of this step.

### Activities for Step 4:

- Perform the Gap Analysis
- Define the EMB's Strategy
- Identify the EMB's Strategic Pillars

- Establish the EMB's Strategic Goals
- Develop the draft Strategy into Action Plan
- Endorse the draft Strategy into Action Plan

## PERFORM THE GAP ANALYSIS

This process allows identification of specific strategic issues the EMB must address to close this gap and achieve its mission.

Through a Gap Analysis, the Strategic Planning Committee can work on developing the EMB's strategic pillars and related goals. Every Committee member should be provided with a copy of the EMB's Strategic Foundations and Organizational Appraisal documents.

The Facilitator should assist the Strategic Planning Committee to identify the gap by performing an analysis of the current state and the desired future:

- The current state is reflected in the Organizational Appraisal
- The knowledge of the EMB is found in the members of the Strategic Planning Committee
- The future of the EMB is found in the vision and guiding principles in the Strategic Foundations document
- The difference between the EMB's current state and the future is the gap

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In conducting the Gap Analysis, the Facilitator may want to break the Strategic Planning Committee into smaller groups to conduct a thorough discussion on particular aspects of what the EMB's operations (e.g., electoral law, political parties, voter education, voter registration, logistics, administration, finance, communication, etc.). The same small groups can define the strategic pillars and goals once the Gap Analysis has been completed.

## DEFINE THE EMB'S STRATEGY

Defining the EMB's strategy involves identifying the required changes to move the EMB towards its vision. In other words, the strategy fills the gap identified in the previous section.

The definition of its strategy allows the EMB to determine basic long-term goals and objectives, adopt the necessary courses of action and commit required financial and human resources to achieve these goals.

The overall strategy of the EMB is defined by:

**Identifying Strategic Pillars.** Pillars are key issues that must be addressed to enable the fulfillment of the EMB's strategy. They are strategic issues critical to fulfilling the mandate, mission, values and core services of the EMB.

**Establishing Strategic Goals.** Goals are long-range performance targets that are consistent with the EMB's mission. Establishing goals will identify the required changes in the EMB to move it from its current situation to its desired future.

## IDENTIFY THE EMB'S STRATEGIC PILLARS

The purpose of this activity is to define the EMB's strategy by identifying and prioritizing key strategic issues it must address over the Strategic Planning Cycle (three to five years). Led by the Facilitator, the Strategic Planning Committee should hold a plenary session and examine these issues in relation to the EMB's ability to achieve its stated vision.

Strategic pillars are the foundations upon which the overall EMB strategy is built. They reflect the desired future captured by the EMB in its vision and mission statements, along with the analysis of the EMB's internal and external environments, its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Once members of the Strategic Planning Committee are familiar with the difference between strategic pillars and goals, the Facilitator should initiate a planning session with the members of the Committee to identify the strategic pillars relevant to the EMB.

Following are three steps to identify strategic pillars:

- Step 1: The Strategic Planning Committee should list all key strategic issues faced by the EMB that have emerged during the discussion
- Step 2: The Strategic Planning Committee should assess and categorize all the items on the list according to the nature of each issue and how this issue affects the EMB in an operational or strategic sense

- Step 3: The Strategic Planning Committee should prioritize each identified issue on an agreed-upon scale (e.g., according to strategic relevance, criticality, urgency, chronological order, etc.) so everyone is clear and agrees on each issue's relative importance

Possible strategic pillars for an EMB could be: voter participation in the electoral process; voter registration and the voter lists; legal framework of the elections; management of the EMB's operations; and development of the EMB staff professional capacity, among others.

## **ESTABLISH THE EMB'S STRATEGIC GOALS**

Once the strategic pillars list is developed and prioritized, the Facilitator assists the Strategic Planning Committee in establishing goals for each key strategic issue.

Efficient planning at this stage of the process will help the EMB effectively deal with concerns that may arise during execution of the Strategic Plan in the following steps of the cycle. Since key strategic issues were identified by the Strategic Planning Committee as a group, establishing strategic goals can be done in smaller groups. This allows each subgroup to address specific goals, in detail, for each identified strategic pillar.

Each breakout group should be assigned a set number of pillars. Each group should determine what change (human, financial, material, cultural, political, operational, etc.) needs to occur to move the EMB toward its vision. Feedback from these

discussions should be captured by the Facilitator on a flip chart and compiled into strategic goal(s).

The breakout groups should be aware of a few important criteria. Strategic goals must:

- Be consistent with and clarify the EMB's vision, mission and principles
- Reflect the realities of the external environment of the EMB
- Comply with the internal environment and capabilities of the EMB
- Be consistent with the EMB's strengths, weaknesses opportunities and strengths as identified through the SWOT Analysis

Below are a few criteria that can be found in most goals developed by EMBs:

- Goals that are achieved fulfill the mission of the EMB or contribute to the performance of its mandated functions, programs and operations
- Goals tend to remain unchanged until the desired outcome is achieved
- Goals normally encompass a relatively long period of three to five years; however, if a goal can be accomplished in fewer than three years, it may be an objective
- Goals address the gaps between the EMB's current and desired levels of performance

- Goals set a clear direction for the EMB; however, they do not set specific milestones or strategies (that task is fulfilled by measurable objectives)
- Goals are within the legal mandate of the EMB. If not, an objective must be established to propose an amendment to legislation to support that goal
- Goals are challenging, measurable and achievable

For example, if voter registration is identified as a strategic pillar for the EMB, strategic goals under this pillar could be: improve quality of voter lists; enhance voter registration procedures; or update IT systems for the voter list database.

Once strategic goals are established, they need to be compared with the guiding principles of the EMB to ensure it can accomplish the goals (what needs to be done) through the behaviors espoused (how the EMB staff will act).

## **DEVELOP THE DRAFT STRATEGY INTO ACTION PLAN**

Once issues and goals are finalized and agreed to by the Strategic Planning Committee, the Core Team should compile the EMB's draft Strategy into Action Plan (Fig. 11).

As long as all key concepts and information are clearly outlined in the draft Strategy into Action Plan, it is up to the EMB to decide how this document should be developed. It could be drafted in a narrative structure, with sentences

describing the elements of the EMB's strategy, or in a schematic way, in which elements are expressed concisely.


## **ENDORSE THE DRAFT STRATEGY INTO ACTION PLAN**

After the Strategy into Action Plan has been endorsed by the EMB's executive management, this document can be used for consultation with key stakeholders of the EMB.

The Plan represents the draft vision of the overall EMB strategy and the basis on which the stakeholder consultation process that is outlined in the next step will unfold.



Figure 11: Draft “Strategy into Action” Plan

<b>(DRAFT) STRATEGY INTO ACTION: 2010-2015</b>					
<b>EMB LOGO</b>  	<b>EMB MISSION</b>  Our mission is to organize, conduct and supervise all elections and referenda, register eligible voters, make regulations for the efficient performance of our functions, impartially serve all stakeholders in the electoral process as a means of promoting and sustaining democracy in our country.	<b>EMB GUIDING PRINCIPLES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Credibility</li> <li>• Impartiality</li> <li>• Integrity</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Professionalism</li> </ul>		<b>EMB VISION</b>  Our vision of the Electoral Commission is that of an independent, credible and well-resourced institution which promotes democracy and good governance by administering elections and referenda in such a manner that the results are acceptable to all.	
	<b>1. Voter participation in the electoral process</b>	<b>2. Voter registration and electoral rolls</b>	<b>3. Voting operations</b>	<b>4. Professional development of EMB staff</b>	<b>5. EMB internal management and communication systems</b>
	<b>1.1. Raise general voter participation</b>	<b>2.1. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>3.1. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>4.1. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>5.1. Strategic Goal</b>
	<b>1.2. Improve legal and procedural framework of the elections</b>	<b>2.2. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>3.2. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>4.2. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>5.2. Strategic Goal</b>
	<b>1.3. Maximize participation of marginalized groups</b>	<b>2.3. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>3.3. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>4.3. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>5.3. Strategic Goal</b>
	<b>1.4. Improve accessibility to polling stations</b>	<b>2.4. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>3.3. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>4.4. Strategic Goal</b>	<b>5.4. Strategic Goal</b>
					<b>5.5. Strategic Goal</b>

STEP 0:  
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STEP 1:  
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STEP 2:  
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STEP 3:  
ASSESS

STEP 4:  
IDENTIFY

**STEP 5:  
CONSULT**

STEP 6:  
STRATEGIZE

STEP 7:  
DEPLOY

STEP 8:  
EXECUTE

## STEP 5 - CONSULT: ENGAGING KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

To create acceptance, understanding and support for the Strategic Plan, the EMB must engage its key internal and external stakeholders in the process by allowing them to provide input and feedback to the Plan.

### Output from Step 5:

*Consult. Stakeholder  
Consultation Report*

This step is about conducting a broad consultation process that involves stakeholders in discussion, review and finalization of the draft Strategy into Action Plan. Its goal is to obtain their input and feedback on the definition of EMB's mission, vision and guiding principles and on its strategy, particularly on the strategic pillars and goals identified in the previous step.

The output produced by the Core Team at the end of this step is the Stakeholder Consultation Report. The report contains the analysis, categorization and summarization of the feedback provided by the EMB's internal and external stakeholders.

The Stakeholder Consultation Report informs the final revision of the draft Strategy into Action Plan by reflecting stakeholder feedback. The revision process takes place in Step 6.

## DEFINE KEY INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

As a kick-off activity for this step, the Strategic Planning Committee, assisted by the Core Team, should define the EMB's key internal and external stakeholders.

Electoral stakeholders<sup>13</sup> were defined earlier in this Guide and categorized as below:

**Internal stakeholders.** The EMB's main constituents, such as the EMB's staff at the central office, as well as those in subsidiary offices at the local level (regional, provincial and municipal offices).

**External stakeholders.** Political party representatives; members of the executive branch of the government; the legislatures; electoral dispute resolution bodies; the judicial system; election monitors; domestic and international election observers; the media; the electorate (actual and prospective voters); civil society organizations; local communities and minority groups; other governmental bodies dealing with human rights, education, women issues, youth issues, persons with disabilities, national census, etc.; the international donor community and electoral assistance providers.

Stakeholders comprise a variety of individuals, groups and organizations, with a range of different expectations, views and interests. Time should be taken to carefully include as many as possible.

Therefore, the Core Team should involve

<sup>13</sup> "Electoral stakeholders" can be defined all individuals, groups and organizations holding a direct interest (or a stake) in the EMB's ethical conduct and operations.

the Strategic Planning Committee in conducting a brainstorming session, led by the Facilitator, to define and identify all key stakeholders of the EMB.

This brainstorming session can help to:

- Ensure a complete and structured list of key internal and external stakeholders of the EMB by individual, groups and/or organization
- Understand interests in and/or influences of these individuals, groups and/or organizations on the EMB
- Define breadth of involvement by stakeholders; how many and which stakeholders will be involved in the consultation process
- Identify the most appropriate method to employ while consulting each stakeholder group

The list of key stakeholders should be constantly maintained and updated, in order to reflect any changes. If the number of stakeholders is high, the process can be limited to individuals who are representative of various stakeholder affiliations. Involving as many stakeholders as possible increases the likelihood that all views will be taken into account.

## PLAN THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION PROCESS

Once EMB stakeholders are identified, the Core Team should immediately start planning the consultation process.

Invitations should be drafted and customized for different stakeholder categories. Invitations should explain the strategic process undertaken by the EMB, its goals and why, how and when stakeholders will be consulted.

A copy of the draft Strategy into Action Plan should be provided to participants in advance so they can familiarize themselves with it before the consultations.

Depending on the number of consultation events and activities to take place and considering that many of them will take place simultaneously, the members of the Strategic Planning Committee should divide themselves into small teams and stay personally engaged in the consultation process.

The Core Team has to define appropriate methods for conducting consultations, set a suggested timeframe and make the necessary logistical arrangements in the various locations where the consultation process will take place.

The following are the most common methods to conduct stakeholder consultations in strategic planning:

**Surveys and questionnaires.** Cost-efficient method to rapidly obtain input from large numbers and diverse categories of stakeholders.

**Individual interviews.** Time-consuming, but help the EMB in building and strengthening personal and institutional relationships with stakeholders.

**Group workshops.** Multi-stakeholder consultations bring together various stakeholders in a neutral forum. They are very effective and transparent mechanisms for sharing ideas, strengthening and fostering relationships, building consensus and developing commitment to the Strategic Plan. To be most effective, large meetings/workshops must be well-structured and bring together stakeholder groups with similar interests.

As a crucial step before implementation, the Core Team should widely publicize the EMB's stakeholders' consultation process. This event and additional publicity makes the public aware that all key internal and external stakeholders have been given the opportunity to participate and there were no arbitrary exclusions.

## IMPLEMENT THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION PROCESS

Implementation of the stakeholder consultation process can vary considerably from case to case, depending on a number of factors. These include: methods employed; breadth and depth of the process; and overall duration and type of stakeholder targeted.

The stakeholder consultation process represents a very sensitive stage in the Strategic Planning Cycle. This process requires a disciplined effort on the part of those responsible for planning and implementing, to ensure that needs,

concerns, interests and perspectives of EMB stakeholders are given systematic and ample consideration. At the end of the process, stakeholder feedback should be effectively processed and duly taken into account.

The needs and expectations of various stakeholders should be carefully managed by the Strategic Planning Committee. These stakeholders often have strong opinions and, at times, a deep sense of frustration regarding sensitive electoral matters relating to the EMB's ethical or operational performance.

If the consultation process is not properly planned, managed and facilitated, it may become an extremely challenging and counterproductive experience for the EMB. The consultation process cannot be regarded as meaningful unless:

- Stakeholders feel, at the end of the consultation, that they have had a real influence on the definition of the strategic direction of the EMB
- Consultations produce focused and constructive discussions which provide realistic and useful feedback

Therefore, when planning the stakeholder consultation process, the Strategic Planning Committee has to carefully consider and try to minimize all possible risks that could cause the consultation process to take a negative turn. Possible risks include, but are not limited to, ineffective facilitation techniques; inadequate information flow between the EMB and its key stakeholders; consultative events poorly organized or managed.

The Strategic Planning Committee needs to be sensitive to differences and potential tensions. It should encourage the EMB's stakeholders to keep the common goals and interests in mind: specifically, improving the EMB's electoral management capacities.

Once the planning and necessary preparations for all aspects of the consultation process have been completed, the Core Team and Strategic Planning Committee should divide themselves into groups and begin facilitating the stakeholder consultation process throughout the country.

## **DEVELOP THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION REPORT**

After the stakeholders' consultation process is concluded, the Core Team can start analyzing, categorizing and summarizing the feedback obtained.

This information is presented in the Stakeholder Consultation Report, which is the output to be produced from Step 5.

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## STEP 6: STRATEGIZE

STEP 7:  
DEPLOY

STEP 8:  
EXECUTE

### STEP 6 - STRATEGIZE: SETTING MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND TIMELINES

With the stakeholder consultation process complete, Step 6 involves the following actions:

- Incorporating feedback from the consultation process into the draft Strategy into Action Plan
- Putting the EMB's strategy into action by laying down the basis for detailed levels of planning at the departmental level of the EMB
- Developing the final Strategy into Action Plan for formal endorsement by the EMB Executive Management

#### Output from Step 6:

*Strategize.* Final EMB Strategy into Action Plan

In strategic planning, the process of laying down the basis for detailed levels of planning at the departmental level of the EMB is normally known as “action planning.”

In many ways, action planning is at the heart of the strategic planning process because it takes the EMB through a systematic process of planning what, when, who and how each action needs to be carried out and what resources or inputs are needed.

While the mission and vision state why the EMB exists and how it intends to achieve its purpose, the action planning process allows

the EMB to “operationalize” actions needed to fulfill its mission.

Normally, the action planning process is accomplished through the following tasks:

- Defining the strategic actions needed to implement the EMB's strategy
- Setting measurable objectives, which are specific, measurable targets to be reached by the EMB for the successful achievement of each strategic goal
- Allocating responsibilities and accountability at a departmental level for implementing and completing each strategic action
- Establishing clear timelines for each strategic action, with defined and completion dates
- Identifying necessary resources to be allocated to each department to implement each strategic action under its responsibility

The expected output at the end of this step is the final Strategy into Action Plan. The final plan incorporates stakeholder feedback, strategic actions and objectives, assignment of departmental responsibilities and allocation of timelines and resources within the EMB. Once stakeholder feedback is incorporated and the action planning exercise completed, the resulting final Strategy into Action Plan has to be endorsed by the EMB's executive management. This document is the second of the three Key Strategic Outputs that comprise the EMB's Strategic Plan.

## Activities for Step 6:

- Incorporate Stakeholder Feedback into the draft Strategy into Action Plan
- Undertake Action Planning
- Define Strategic Actions
- Set Measurable Objectives
- Allocate Actions to each Department of the EMB
- Set Timelines for each Strategic Action
- Allocate the Necessary Resources
- Finalize the Strategy into Action Plan
- Endorse the final Strategy into Action Plan

## INCORPORATE STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK INTO THE DRAFT STRATEGY INTO ACTION PLAN

Once the Stakeholder Consultation Report is drafted, the Core Team should organize a brainstorming session, led by the Facilitator, with the Strategic Planning Committee. During this session, the findings of this Report will be examined, clustered and discussed. The findings which are agreed upon as relevant, realistic, achievable and critical should be incorporated by the Core Team in the draft Strategy into Action Plan.

The draft Strategy into Action Plan, inclusive of feedback received through the consultation process, serves as a basis for the ensuing activities.

## UNDERTAKE ACTION PLANNING

Developing a strategic plan is one thing, but putting the EMB's strategy into action is another. At the end of a strategic planning process, it is not uncommon for a strategic plan to remain unimplemented because the set strategy fails to be put into effective action.

Hence, for the strategy to be successfully implemented, the Core Team should carefully prepare the process of action planning, set clearly defined activities and an adequate timeframe for its various phases.

The Strategic Planning Committee and department managers have to be involved in the action planning process. With assistance from the Core Team and the Facilitator, the process of identifying strategic actions requires the Strategic Planning Committee and department managers (hereinafter referred as the "Group") to convert the draft Strategy into Action Plan into an overall action plan. This plan should describe how, for each strategic pillar, the corresponding strategic goals will be reached and by which EMB department.

This process is illustrated in Figure 12.

To undertake action planning, the Facilitator should conduct a brainstorming session (or more than one session, if needed) to define the strategic actions.

During this session, the Group should:

- Examine each strategic pillar and strategic goal defined by the EMB in the draft Strategy into Action Plan

Figure 12: Action Planning and Strategy Development



- Determine how the EMB's strength and capabilities can be best employed to address the pillars and goals
  - Analyze opportunities and strengths and look for ways to synthesize the two
  - Explore and choose the best approaches for the EMB to address pillars and goals
- accomplish this task. A brainstorming session is particularly useful. To conduct this session, the Facilitator should:
- Begin by reviewing the strategic pillars and goals outlined in the draft Strategy into Action Plan of the EMB
  - Distribute blank paper and pens to each person in the group and explain the definition and concept of a strategic action (a targeted activity that needs to be implemented in order to attain a specific objective)
  - Ask each person to formulate critical steps by defining what actions must be taken if the strategic goal in question is to be achieved through the agreed strategy

## DEFINE STRATEGIC ACTIONS

Strategic actions are the essence of the EMB's strategy. Strategic actions can be defined as: an efficiently targeted activity to be implemented in order to attain a specific objective. By default, therefore, a strategic action implies the attainment of a goal; it serves as a means to enact the EMB's efforts to achieve targeted objectives.

While the definition of strategic action implies a combination of rational, scientific examination and educated best guesses, there exist several effective methods to



- Facilitate group discussion on how to break these critical steps down into required strategic action (or actions, if more than one) that needs to be implemented in order to achieve the desired goals
- In determining strategic actions, ask the following questions:
  - Does this strategic action meet/address the strategic pillar and its goal(s)?
  - Is this aligned with the EMB mission?
  - How likely is it that the suggested strategy will achieve the strategic goal and its measurable objective(s)?
  - What are the benefits for using this approach?
  - Does the EMB possess the required organizational and operational capabilities to implement this strategy? If not, how do we need to reorganize? How long will the reorganization take?
  - Are there procedural, regulatory or legal changes that need to be made to implement the strategy? If so, what are they and how long will it take to implement them?
  - What are the necessary steps to implement the strategy? How long will each step take?
  - Is this approach financially viable?
  - What additional resources will be needed to implement each strategic action?

Figure 13 illustrates a basic action planning model. Beginning with the column on the left, the pillars, goals and actions as defined in the draft Strategy into Action Plan can be inserted.

Figure 13 - Basic Action Planning Model

1. STRATEGIC PILLAR	1.1 STRATEGIC GOAL	1.1.1. STRATEGIC ACTION
		1.1.2. STRATEGIC ACTION
		1.1.3. STRATEGIC ACTION
	1.2 STRATEGIC GOAL	1.2.1. STRATEGIC ACTION
		1.2.2. STRATEGIC ACTION
		1.2.3. STRATEGIC ACTION
	1.3 STRATEGIC GOAL	1.3.1. STRATEGIC ACTION
		1.3.2. STRATEGIC ACTION
		1.3.3. STRATEGIC ACTION

The Facilitator should:

- Collect the papers from the group and display them on a wall once the group completes its work
- Involve the group in placing papers under the strategic pillar to which they belong. It is possible that a particular action could fall under different pillars
- Verify that any critical actions are not missing; however, in case anything is missing, fill in additional papers and add them to the wall
- Consolidate the steps in the basic action planning model

In defining strategic actions, it could also be helpful for the group to utilize the so-called “SMART”<sup>14</sup> principles. Strategic actions should be:

**Specific.** Strategic actions should be as specific as possible. Every person who reads the plan should understand what actions are to be accomplished, how and when. Wherever specific actions are required, the Implementation Plan should detail the EMB department that is responsible (individual tasks are delegated in Step 7).

**Measurable.** Every strategic action should be measurable. Specific time frames should be included for each action to be accomplished. Milestone dates should be established so progress can be reviewed. Clear accountability for completion of milestones allows each department manager

to rapidly determine where obstacles and/or delays in implementing the action occur. It enables the department to find and address any problem before it becomes larger and negatively affects the overall success of the strategic plan.

**Achievable.** Every action in the Implementation Plan should be achievable within the allocated timeframe and budget. Actions not achievable within the timeframe and budget place the entire objective in jeopardy. For example, a procurement schedule that does not allow sufficient time for the production or shipping of needed supplies and materials is not achievable. In developing every action in the Implementation Plan, EMB department managers should always ask: “Can we achieve the objectives of this strategic action within the time and budget that we have allocated to it?”

**Realistic.** Strategic actions should be realistic and reflect the actual environment of the country in which the EMB operates – physical, cultural, social and political. For example, placing a strong reliance on individuals, departments, or institutions to perform in a timely and effective manner, when they have not done so in the past, is not a realistic assumption.

**Time-Phased.** Everything cannot be accomplished at once. Some strategic actions in the timetable of the Implementation Plan logically follow one another. Others can proceed simultaneously. Appropriate timing means that the actions are more achievable and realistic. Failure to adhere to a realistic timetable will result in the difficulty to accomplish tasks on time and increase costs.

<sup>14</sup> The acronym “SMART” stands for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Phased.

## SET MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

Developing measurable objectives is the final step in the strategic process of determining how to get the EMB “where it wants to be.” As opposed to strategic goals, objectives have specific timeframes and are measurable.

Objectives are specific, measurable targets that need to be reached by the EMB to accomplish each strategic goal. Objectives have to be measurable because they are used to monitor and evaluate progress for each goal set by the EMB. If the objective is written very clearly, it can be measurable by definition.

Examples of both poorly-designed and well-designed objectives are found in Figure 14.

When setting measurable objectives (and timelines), it must be kept in mind they are only targets. As such, they can be changed if the conditions under which the assumptions were made significantly change. Any deviations for objectives should be justified, explained and widely-understood.

Measurable objectives are used as assessment tools. Once an objective is defined, it becomes the foundation for assessing progress in the completion of the strategic action to which that objective is connected.

In setting measurable objectives, the following questions can be of guidance:

- Do objectives specify what they need to achieve?

Figure 14: Objective Breakdown

POORLY DESIGNED OBJECTIVES :	WELL DESIGNED OBJECTIVES :
Increased voter participation	7% increase in voter participation in the next elections
Reduce the number of spoiled ballot papers	Reduce number of spoiled ballots to less than 2% of the total number of ballots cast
Register all eligible electorate	Register 100% of the electorate by the end of the registration period

- Is it possible to measure whether the objectives are being met?
- Are the set objectives achievable and attainable?
- Can the objectives be realistically achieved with available resources?
- Can the objective be met by the target date?

## ALLOCATE ACTIONS TO EACH DEPARTMENT OF THE EMB

Once strategic actions and objectives have been defined, they need to be ordered in a logical or chronological sequence.

The concerned departments of the EMB must be given responsibility and become formally accountable for implementation and completion of each action.

When a single strategic action involves more than one department of the EMB, a team composed of the managers from each concerned department can be assigned responsibilities in the division. The EMB department manager bearing the greatest degree of responsibility for the strategic action is allocated main accountability for implementation and completion.

In the process of allocation of strategic actions to various departments of the EMB, it is important the department managers make realistic assumptions about future conditions in which each strategic activity is going to be executed. These assumptions must build on the past experience of the EMB, its current activities and any projected trends or conditions that might affect the smooth and timely execution of the concerned strategic activity.

An obvious example would be assumptions made for a specific level of funding. If the conditions under which the resource assumptions were made at an earlier stage significantly change, the entire Implementation Plan, or some aspects of it, may need to be amended accordingly.

## SET TIMELINES FOR EACH STRATEGIC ACTION

In setting timelines for completion for each strategic action in the draft Strategy into Action Plan, the group should reflect on the following questions:

- In the context of the overall Strategy into Action Plan, when should this strategic action be accomplished?
- Does the responsible department manager think this strategic action can be accomplished in the time that has been established for it, or does the timeline need to be adjusted?
- Is the timeframe for this strategic action consistent with the time needed to complete individual tasks within each Department of the EMB, or does the plan need to be adjusted?
- Is the overall timeframe of all strategic actions falling under one strategic pillar consistent with the timeframes for the completion of other objectives and goals of the EMB?

In practice, it may be necessary to set the dates for each strategic action in the draft Strategy into Action Plan before an overall timeframe can be developed.

## ALLOCATE THE NECESSARY RESOURCES

Another important task for each EMB department manager is determining the financial impact of specific strategic actions that have been allocated to his or her department and the identification of resources necessary to carry out each action. Financial impact becomes the basis for developing a budget and submitting requests for funds to EMB Executive Management.

Normally, resources or inputs needed for conducting strategic actions can include: finances, human resources, materials, services, facilities, means of transport, commodities, and technologies, among others.

Assessing what is currently available against what is actually required in terms of resources is critical at this point. In order to assess financial costs for implementation of a particular action, department managers should examine the diverse resources the action requires. department managers must ensure these resources are adequate for the successful and timely completion of the strategic action to which they relate. This can normally be done on the basis of previous experience, or, when there is no previous experience, through a careful costing exercise using the experience of other managers and staff of the EMB.

To avoid creating unrealistic expectations, planning decisions should be based on the financial reality of the EMB. Emphasis on efficient operations means that, regardless of the current fiscal, economic, or political climate, the EMB should conduct planning under the assumption that future funds will be limited. Concerned department managers must ensure they have the required resources and inputs to undertake the envisaged strategic activities. Where the fulfillment of strategic goals is considered to be critical, and the available resources are deemed inadequate to address these goals, the concerned department manager should identify and propose ways in which those resources can be found.

## FINALIZE THE STRATEGY INTO ACTION PLAN

There is no set rule on how the Strategy into Action Plan should be finalized. The key is to keep the wording concise, simple, detailed and clear. One method is to develop a numbering system to identify each strategic pillar and the corresponding strategic goal (or goals) and strategic action (or actions). For example:

- Strategic pillars can be numbered 1, 2, 3, etc.
- Strategic goal/s corresponding to each pillar can be numbered 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, etc.
- Strategic actions corresponding to each goal can be numbered 1.1.1., 2.1.1, 3.1.1, etc.
- Objectives can be simply attached to the corresponding goal

The number system does not necessarily need to correspond to the importance of the goal or the order in which the goals will be accomplished. Figure 15 contains a sample structure using the numbering system.

The department manager with the highest responsibility for implementation of one or more strategic actions is accountable to EMB executive management for the successful and timely completion of the correlated strategic goals. The managers for other departments who have correlated minor responsibilities should also provide support.

Figure 15 - Sample of the “Strategy into Action” Plan:

#	STRATEGIC PILLAR	STRATEGIC GOALS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS	MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES	RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT/ MANAGER	TIMELINE FROM/ TO:	COSTS/ INPUTS
1	PILLAR	1.1. GOAL	1.1.1.				
			1.1.2.				
			1.1.3.				
			1.1.4.				
		1.2. GOAL	1.2.1.				
			1.2.2.				
			1.2.3.				

It should be noted that, during this step, this type of planning and responsibility-allocation only takes place at a department level of the EMB. Individual tasks will be assigned by departmental managers in Step 7.

The document resulting at the end of this planning activity is the final Strategy into Action Plan, which constitutes the EMB’s overall action plan at a departmental level.

## ENDORSE THE FINAL STRATEGY INTO ACTION PLAN

Once finalized, the final Strategy into Action Plan must be endorsed by the EMB’s executive management.

This document is the second of the three Key Strategic Outputs that comprise the EMB’s Strategic Plan and serves as a basis for the development of the Strategy into Execution Plan, described in the following pages.

## STEP 7 - DEPLOY: DEPLOYING STRATEGIES FROM DEPARTMENT TO INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

The final Strategy into Action Plan shapes the EMB's overall plan of action that:

- Assigns specific responsibilities for each strategic action to each department within the EMB
- Makes each department manager responsible and accountable for executing and bringing that action to completion – on target, on time and in full

Defining the EMB's plan of action does not automatically guarantee its implementation, since failures to achieve timely and adequate operationalization of strategic actions may still occur.

Some of the most important and frequent reasons for this failure include:

### Outputs of Step 7:

*Deploy. Strategy into Execution Plan and EMB's Public Strategic Plan*

- Lack of understanding by department staff of the overall strategy of the EMB
- Poor alignment among strategic activities assigned to departments and the way in which these activities relate to each other in addressing the overall EMB's strategy

- Inadequacy (or disparity) of resources devoted to implementation of strategic activities in the EMB's strategy

Problems in execution of the EMB's plan of action can be avoided by creating and pursuing a disciplined "strategy deployment" process within each department of the EMB. This process should be communicated to the entire EMB staff and be clearly understood and followed by those operating in each department of the EMB.

The implementation of this step allows the EMB to effectively deploy its strategy by transforming its Strategy into Action Plan into the Strategy into Execution Plan.

In practical terms, for the EMB, this transformation involves undertaking detailed planning within each of its departments. This occurs through the deployment of the EMB strategy from a department level (voter registration, human resources, operations and training departments) to the individual level, thereby reaching the persons working within each of the EMB departments.

This disciplined process is normally referred to as "strategy deployment" and requires each strategic action to be broken into corresponding "activities" – or specific tasks – which then need to be allocated to individuals working within that department. Prior to this step, actions were only allocated at a department level in the EMB.

The first of two outputs to be produced at the completion of this step is the Strategy into Execution Plan. This document comprises all department implementation plans (or department workplans) that establish what

STEP 0:  
ENVISION

STEP 1:  
PLAN

STEP 2:  
DEFINE

STEP 3:  
ASSESS

STEP 4:  
IDENTIFY

STEP 5:  
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STEP 6:  
STRATEGIZE

**STEP 7:  
DEPLOY**

STEP 8:  
EXECUTE

activities must be conducted to accomplish each strategic action. This plan also assigns, within each department of the EMB, individual responsibilities, clear accountability mechanisms and implementation timelines for each activity.

The envisaged output for this step is not only limited to the development of the Strategy into Execution Plan. This step also involves the production of another important output: the EMB's Public Strategic Plan.

Various elements defined by the EMB through the strategic planning process, including stakeholder feedback, should be summarized in a public document. This public document should set and promote a clear, transparent and consistent message on which fundamental decisions leading to the achievement of the EMB's strategic direction were taken and will be implemented.

Therefore, at the completion of this step, the EMB has to produce the following two outputs:

- Strategy into Execution Plan, which has to be formally endorsed by EMB executive management
- EMB's Public Strategic Plan, once completed, which should also be formally endorsed by EMB Executive Management and then publicly disseminated

### Activities for Step 7:

- Plan the Strategy Deployment Process
- Turn Strategic Actions into Activities

- Assign Individual Responsibilities
- Develop the Strategy into Execution Plan
- Endorse the Strategy into Execution Plan
- Draft the EMB's Public Strategic Plan
- Endorse and Publicize the EMB's Public Strategic Plan

## PLAN THE STRATEGY DEPLOYMENT PROCESS

First, the Core Team has to plan and organize an explanatory meeting with department managers. Not all managers may have been closely involved in the strategic planning process until this step. Some might not be entirely familiar with the key outputs this process has produced and the activities that must occur going forward.

At the beginning of this explanatory meeting, the Facilitator should:

- Provide an overview of the strategic planning process undertaken prior to this step by the EMB, and describe how this process has been designed, planned, organized and executed
- Describe key milestones that have been achieved (and those to be achieved) in the context of the EMB's strategic direction and plans



- Take the audience through the process of the Strategy into Execution Plan, explaining, in detail, the next step and how the EMB's strategy deployment will be implemented
- Clarify what is expected from them, what beneficial results this activity will bring them, their department and the way in which they conduct their work
- Conclude by explaining what is going to be produced at the end of this step

Next, the Facilitator should devote the remaining part of the meeting to establish a timeframe for a series of follow-up strategy deployment meetings with the various department managers involved. In follow-up meetings, they will engage in strategy deployment for their respective departments.

Each of these follow-up meetings will be led by the manager responsible for the strategy deployment within the Department this manager supervises (for example, when the Voter Registration Department needs to implement the strategy deployment process, the Manager of this department will be the lead).

The Core Team and Facilitator will also provide assistance in follow-up meetings. Managers who are required and those who have responsibility for interconnected strategic actions will be asked for assistance in follow-up meetings. For example, if any legal reform to the law regulating the voter registration process is part of that strategic action, the manager of the Legal Department should also be present.

## TURN STRATEGIC ACTIONS INTO ACTIVITIES

The Facilitator, with the support of each department manager and select members of the Strategic Planning Committee, should facilitate the follow-up strategy deployment meetings at the department level.

First, the Facilitator will assist each manager and the department's team in using the Strategy into Action Plan as the basis to break down each strategic action for which the department is responsible. The Facilitator will clarify the activities needing implementation, along with measurable objectives set for that action.

Activities differ from actions. Activities are specific tasks required by a strategic action to be implemented to meet measurable objectives. For example, conducting a national voter information campaign is a strategic action, while workshops, media advertisements, production of printed materials and training sessions for educators are activities corresponding to that strategic action that either an individual staff person or team operating can accomplish.

Strategy deployment can become a very powerful tool when used across the EMB to support its staff's collective drive towards achieving its strategic direction. At the same time, this drive ensures consistency and alignment between the EMB's activities and corresponding actions to be implemented by other departments.

Through effective strategy deployment, each department team and each individual in that team remains responsible and

accountable for implementation of allocated activities. Each individual is responsible and accountable for one (or more) activity and remains aligned to the general Implementation Plan of the EMB, the various departments and workplan of the specific department team to which this individual belongs.

## ASSIGN INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Once the activities needed for successful implementation of each strategic action have been identified, each manager has to assign individual responsibilities to staff within the department's team.

This type of assignment involves creating department workplans. Each workplan is used to allocate specific responsibilities,

performance indicators, targets and milestones of each activity to individual members of a team working within a specific department of the EMB. A workplan serves as a performance management tool used by each department manager to keep track of the execution of activities by individual, while monitoring the consequences from resulting actions (or, alternatively, from lack of action).

An example of a department workplan template is provided in Figure 16.

Using the template shown (or a similar one), each manager should assign individual responsibilities for implementation of the department workplan. The manager should detail which specific staff person is in charge of implementing each activity and who will be accountable for its completion. It should be

Figure 16: Department Workplan

DEPARTMENTWORKPLAN								
Strategic Action: 10.2 - [Insert definition of Strategic Action here]		Measurable Objective: 1. [Insert objective here] 2. [Insert objective here]		Owner: [Name of Manager responsible for this Action]				
Ref #	Individual Activities	Resp	Performance Indicators	Targets	Milestones			
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
10.2.1	Insert description of activity	Insert name of responsible staff	Insert measurable indicators of what needs to be achieved here	Plan Fully Implemented				
10.2.2	Insert description of activity	Insert name of responsible staff	Insert measurable indicators of what needs to be achieved here	End of Q1/10				
10.2.3	Insert description of activity	Insert name of responsible staff	Insert measurable indicators of what needs to be achieved here	TBC				
10.2.4	Insert description of activity	Insert name of responsible staff	Insert measurable indicators of what needs to be achieved here	Specific project				
10.2.5	Insert description of activity	Insert name of responsible staff	Insert measurable indicators of what needs to be achieved here	TBC				
10.2.6	Insert description of activity	Insert name of responsible staff	Insert measurable indicators of what needs to be achieved here	End of Q2/11				

kept in mind that in electoral management, responsibilities for a specific activity may overlap among different departments of the EMB. In this case, departmental workplans should be jointly developed by the department managers and teams involved.

Once individual responsibilities within the department team are defined, the manager – and team members – should set performance indicators for each activity. Performance indicators are a set of agreed-upon measures of critical success factors reflecting progress toward the achievement of a specific activity. Setting realistic performance indicators for each activity is critical because these indicators will be used by the manager to constantly monitor progress of each activity.

Finally, the manager and team should estimate a date when each activity will begin and end. It is necessary to set the timeline for each activity in the department's workplan before resources are allocated to that department by the Action Plan.

In particular, department workplans help the EMB:

- Ensure department managers and teams operating in each department know the decisions, actions and deliverables for which they are responsible and accountable
- Set a coherent, compelling direction for the entire EMB staff
- Create clear plans for implementation for each department's team, driving the delivery of activities in a coordinated way
- Hold individuals working within a department to be held accountable for their areas of performance
- Increase the ability of managers to quickly identify and mitigate potential risks
- Standardize methods for deploying overall strategy, ensuring consistency of action and that each team adds its own contribution to achieving the EMB's mission and strategic goal
- Link strategic actions to individual workplans, improve accountability and ensure individual staff empowerment throughout various levels of the organization
- Measure progress systematically and reward performance, enable near real-time monitoring of detailed operations and provide each department with the ability to adjust rapidly to changing conditions
- Enhance the quality of work done or service provided: EMB staff, understanding their progress and performance will be measured, tend to perform at a higher standard

## **DEVELOP THE STRATEGY INTO EXECUTION PLAN**

Department workplans finalized by each department manager and their teams, combined, form the EMB's Strategy into Execution Plan. This is a highly detailed implementation plan for each department, establishing activities at the individual level and assigning clear responsibilities and operational timelines.

## **ENDORSE THE STRATEGY INTO EXECUTION PLAN**

Once completed, the Strategy into Execution Plan must be formally endorsed by the EMB's executive management. This is the third and last of the Key Strategic Outputs that comprise the overall EMB's Strategic Plan.

## **PUT THE EMB'S PUBLIC STRATEGIC PLAN TOGETHER**

As a next step, the EMB can draft its Public Strategic Plan. A strategic plan is simply a document that summarizes, in 10-20 pages, why the EMB exists, what it is trying to accomplish and how it will do so. The document should educate and guide the EMB's public to be familiar with the EMB's most important plans, priorities and issues. The more concise and ordered the document, the greater the likelihood that it will be helpful in informing the public about EMB operations and strategic direction. After all of the time and effort put forth by the EMB in this process, it is crucial the EMB publicly disseminates the written Strategic Plan.

The EMB should make this document public for two important reasons:

- Strengthen the overall legitimacy of the Strategic Plan and increase the transparency of the EMB's course of action to realize the objectives set in the Plan
- Hold the EMB, at all times, publicly accountable to all key stakeholders for met and unmet strategic objectives

The EMB's Public Strategic Plan also provides an opportunity for the EMB to use it as a marketing tool for a wide variety of outreach purposes. The Plan can promote the "new" the EMB, strengthening its image, and reasserting or solidifying its credibility in the eyes of external stakeholders.

An effective way to widely disseminate the EMB's Public Strategic Plan is through a public relations campaign conducted in conjunction with the publication of the Plan. This can involve a diverse set of activities, including publishing the Public Strategic Plan on the EMB's website, disseminating hard copies of the Plan among concerned stakeholders and establishing a forum/FAQ on the EMB's website.

The Public Strategic Plan cannot be drafted while the strategic planning process is ongoing. It should be drafted by the Core Team based on the results of the strategic planning process and discussed thoroughly with members of the Strategic Planning Committee and individuals who were involved in the strategic planning exercise.

This Plan is produced by the EMB at the end of the strategic planning exercise because it is a combination and amalgamation of the following three Key Strategic Outputs:

- Key Strategic Output 1: **Strategic Foundations** document (completion of Step 2)
- Key Strategic Output 2: **Strategy into Action Plan** (completion of Step 6)
- Key Strategic Output 3: **Strategy into Execution Plan** (completion of this Step)

Below is a brief description of each of the components of their public strategic plans, along with an example of a common format used by other EMBs for compilation.

**Table of contents.** The Public Strategic Plan should include a table of contents.

### **Letter by the Chairperson of the EMB.**

A cover letter from the Chairperson of the EMB introduces the plan to the reader and provides a “stamp of approval” for the set course of action. The letter demonstrates that the EMB has achieved a critical level of internal agreement. The letter is often combined with the Introduction.

**Introduction.** In one or two pages, this section should summarize the strategic plan. It should make reference to the EMB’s mission and vision, highlight the overall strategic direction envisioned by the EMB and its associated long-range goals, explain the strategic and consultative

processes undertaken and acknowledge everyone involved in the process and those that contributed to its outcome. From the introduction, the reader should understand the EMB’s priorities.

**The EMB’s Mission and Vision Statements.** These statements can stand alone without any introductory or explanatory text.

**The EMB’s Guiding Principles.** The description of the organizational values of the EMB can be expanded.

**The EMB’s Mandate, Organizational Profile, Structure and History.** In one or two pages, the readers should have an understanding of the:

- Legal framework explains Constitutional and legislative mandates of the EMB
- EMB structure depicts way in which the EMB is structured and its profile as an organization (organogram, leadership, departments, staff, etc.)
- History of the EMB relates key events, accomplishments, reforms over time, statistics, facts, so the EMB’s Strategic Plan can be positioned in the context in which it has been developed
- A description of the EMB’s key external stakeholders

### **Environmental issues and challenges.**

This section should contain a description of the environment in which the EMB operates and the way in which this influences the effective performance of its

mandated functions. This could include issues and challenges such as social and demographic trends, changes in electoral management practices, a greater reliance of electoral operations on technology and the need to further professionalize the EMB's staff.

### **Strategic Pillars and Strategic Goals.**

This section makes explicit the strategic thinking behind the plan. External readers will better understand the rationale that drove the EMB in its strategic direction. This section may be presented as a brief outline of ideas or as a narrative that covers several pages. It should detail the strategic pillars and associated strategic goals identified during the strategic planning sessions. A certain emphasis should be put on the stakeholders' involvement in defining the EMB's strategic direction through an inclusive and transparent consultation process.

### **Strategic Actions and Measurable Objectives.**

In many ways the strategic actions and measurable objectives are the heart of the strategic plan. While the mission and vision answer the big questions about why the EMB exists and how it seeks to fulfill its purpose, the strategic actions and measurable objectives describe the plan of action – what the EMB intends to do over the next few years. This section should serve as a useful guide for operational planning and a reference for evaluation.

For clarity of presentation, strategic goals, actions and objectives should be grouped by program activity.

**Appendices.** The reason to include

any appendices is to provide needed documentation for interested readers. They should be included only if they will enhance the reader's understanding of the plan.

## **ENDORSE AND PUBLICIZE THE EMB'S PUBLIC STRATEGIC PLAN**

Once completed and before being published, the EMB's Public Strategic Plan should be formally endorsed by the EMB's executive management. After being endorsed and published, the Plan should be also publicly disseminated.

## STEP 8 - EXECUTE: EXECUTING AND MONITORING THE EMB'S STRATEGY

Once the Strategy into Execution Plan is developed and endorsed by EMB executive management and individual workplans finalized, the EMB's strategy can finally be put into execution.

### Output of Step 8:

*Execute. Milestones  
Progress Review*

Monitoring the status of implementation of the Strategy into Execution Plan is, for the EMB, as important as identifying strategic pillars and goals. An effective execution of each department's workplan requires the relevant manager to undertake continual monitoring of the activities being implemented within the department.

The expected output to be produced at the completion of this step is the Milestones Progress Review. This is a quarterly review of the progress in achievement of milestones drafted by each department and submitted to the EMB's executive management.

### Activities for Step 8:

- Establish a Meaningful Monitoring System
- Monitor and Evaluate Progress of Workplans
- Accommodate Change in the Workplans
- Develop the Milestones Progress Review

## ESTABLISH A MEANINGFUL MONITORING SYSTEM

Unless the EMB establishes a meaningful system to measure the progress of implementation, the EMB will remain constrained by operations in a constant crisis mode. Activities within each department should be regularly monitored and evaluated to verify whether they are completed as scheduled.

One of the most common performance measures for a department manager to evaluate the effective accomplishment of a certain goal, objective or activity is to regularly determine whether the person responsible is accomplishing it as scheduled. If the Manager makes such a determination too late, the timely and successful implementation of the department's workplan will be seriously affected.

In making this evaluation, managers must keep track of, constantly and simultaneously, a combination of elements within the workplan of their department:

- Individual progress in implementing activities comprising the department's workplan
- Changes in any aspect of the EMB's external operating environment which may affect the implementation of any of their department's activities

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- Levels of key external stakeholders' satisfaction with implementation of the workplan
- Overview of the financial status in the implementation of every activity comprising the department's workplan

Monitoring can become a meaningless exercise unless this activity is subject to clear lines of accountability. Effective monitoring of a department's activities relies on different levels of individual and collective accountability:

- Each member of the department's team is individually accountable to the relevant department manager for successful completion of the specific activity for which he or she is responsible
- Each member of the department's team is also collectively accountable to the team and its manager for the implications on the broader department action of the successful completion of his or her activity
- In turn, managers are accountable to EMB executive management for what their departments have or have not achieved

This vertical accountability line is crucial as it ensures the EMB is following the direction established during the strategic planning process.

Establishing a meaningful monitoring system means setting several consecutive and intermediate milestones that must be passed by members of a department team at regular

intervals of time to accomplish a goal, meet an objective or complete an activity.

The establishment of milestones to evaluate progress is a critical factor for the successful implementation of each department workplan. The use of milestones provides department managers the opportunity to evaluate progress and make necessary adjustments in the management of activities. Milestones also free department managers from performing day-to-day oversight of progress on all components of the workplan at all times.

## **MONITOR AND EVALUATE PROGRESS OF WORKPLANS**

The department workplan template shown in the previous step (Step 7) serves as a tool for performance measurement to monitor disciplined and timely execution of actions and activities.

Using department workplans enable managers to assign individual responsibilities during the strategy deployment process (Step 6) and define clear lines for individual accountability. Individual accountability is set with performance indicators, targets and milestones for each activity. This provides a strong basis for monitoring progress in the execution of workplan activities.

It is through performance measures that each member of the department team is made both individually and collectively accountable for the timely and effective accomplishment of the activity (or activities) assigned to him or her.



Figure 17: Evaluating Workplans

Ref #	Individual Activities	Resp	Performance Indicators	Targets	Milestones			
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
10.2.1	Insert description of activity	Insert name of responsible staff	Insert measurable indicators of what needs to be achieved here	Plan Fully Implemented				

In using the template shown in Figure 17 to monitor and evaluate progress of the department's workplan, EMB department managers must regularly determine whether performance indicators and targets for each activity in the department's workplan are being achieved:

- Outcome 1: Performance indicators and targets for a specific activity have been met
  - Department manager should acknowledge progress with the member of the Team
  - Department Manager should report such progress to Team, other EMB departments and upper levels of the EMB
- Outcome 2: Performance indicators and targets for a specific activity have not been met
  - Department manager should assess whether the specific activity can be achieved according to the milestones as established in the workplan
  - If not, the manager must determine with the specific team member answers to the following questions: why not; should the milestone be changed; are there adequate resources; or are there other constraints that prevent the desired result?

The individual members of a department team should report progress for each activity to their Manager. The department manager then reports to the EMB executive management team. Both levels can report at regular and agreed intervals of time. This allows the manager to concentrate on problematic activities, while activities implemented on target, on time and in full, need less of the manager's attention.

Managers should establish certain rules for reporting with their team members: timeframe for regular reporting; content of reports; and method of reporting. The frequency of the reports should be enough to provide the manager with a view of progress, but not so frequently that minimal progress will be evidenced between reporting dates.

Each EMB must decide on the frequency of reporting. Ideally, department managers should report to the EMB executive management on a quarterly basis. Department teams should report to their manager on a monthly basis.

## ACCOMMODATE CHANGE IN THE WORKPLANS

How effectively department workplans can accomplish allocated activities heavily depends on the adaptability of the workplans to accommodate possible deviations. Workplans are meant to serve as roadmaps, to be followed by every EMB Department in

the implementation of individual activities. As such, they should be adaptive enough to accommodate any necessary changes that managing an electoral process always entail. Over the duration of a Strategic Planning Cycle, the EMB's vision and mission most often remain the same; however, there could be instances in which some identified strategic goals and objectives might need revision.

Hence, it is possible to deviate from a previously established workplan if any of the conditions necessary for achieving the goals have changed. While the EMB should advance with its strategic plan as established, it should also be prepared to accommodate change and revise its strategies, as necessary. Corrective actions need to be taken quickly to compensate for the dynamically evolving environment within which most EMBs operate.

To most effectively accommodate change, department managers have to evaluate, on a continuing basis, what is progressing and what is not. Regular evaluation helps managers keep implementation of activities on track and enables them to quickly adjust their workplans to meet any challenges caused by changing conditions in the internal or external environment.

However, while being flexible to adapt to change in their workplans, Managers should also assess and understand the reasons for these deviations. Managers should update the workplan to reflect the new direction, communicate and explain the reasons for any deviation to their teams. This is most important for members who will be directly affected by those deviations.

Changes in the workplan usually result from changes in the EMB's external environment, in stakeholders' expectations, in assumed availability of resources for implementation, in the legal framework of the election and in sudden political developments. Department Managers have the responsibility to determine which changes require action and which require regular monitoring.

When change is needed, Department Managers should ensure that everyone in their department has a solid understanding of: the change that is going to be made to the workplan; what is causing this change; and why the change should be made. This ensures staff know what to expect and when to expect it. Deviations from the original workplan should always be documented, so key lessons can be learned – and applied – from one Strategic Planning Cycle to the next.

## **DEVELOP THE MILESTONES PROGRESS REVIEW**

The output produced at the end of the last step in the Strategic Planning Cycle is the Milestones Progress Review. It is a quarterly review of the progress made every three months, by each department of the EMB, in the achievement of milestones set for each activity.

This report is submitted to EMB executive management for consideration and possible action. The production of this output completes the Strategic Planning Cycle.

# Samples

## AGGREGATED STRATEGIC PLANNING ELEMENTS

For comparative purposes and inspiration, real examples of strategic planning elements formulated by Electoral Management Bodies across the world have been aggregated below.

### Mission Statements:

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	EMB's MISSION STATEMENT:
Afghanistan – Independent Election Commission (IEC)	The IEC is a constitutional body. IEC is a professional election management body; its immediate task is conducting free and fair elections and referendums in an efficient and impartial way.
Australia – Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)	Our mission is to help people have their say in who will represent them in the Parliament of Australia. We do this by providing impartial and accessible electoral services.
Australia – Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC)	To provide Western Australians with quality electoral services through the conduct of impartial and independent elections and the promotion of public awareness of electoral matters, thereby fostering public confidence and participation in the electoral process.
Botswana – Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure common understanding of the electoral process by election staff and party agents.</li> <li>• To ensure transparency in the electoral process.</li> <li>• To maintain quality database of the electorate.</li> <li>• To ensure that all eligible people vote in all elections.</li> <li>• To ensure that voters have knowledge and skills on the electoral process.</li> <li>• To promote and nurture democracy.</li> <li>• To ensure that IEC personnel are motivated to carry out the mandate of the organization.</li> <li>• To be a reputable effective organization.</li> <li>• To ensure that resources are adequate and properly managed for effective delivery.</li> </ul>
Canada – Elections BC (British Columbia)	To serve democracy in British Columbia through the fair and impartial administration of the provincial electoral process.

*A Vision without action is a dream. Action without vision is simply passing the time. Action with Vision is making a positive difference.*

*Joel Barker*

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	EMB's MISSION STATEMENT:
Canada – Elections Canada	<p>Elections Canada is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament. We must be prepared at all times to conduct a federal general election, by-election or referendum, administer the political financing provisions of the Canada Elections Act, monitor compliance and enforce electoral legislation. Elections Canada is also mandated to conduct voter education and information programs, and provide support to the independent boundaries commissions in charge of adjusting the boundaries of federal electoral districts following each decennial census. Finally, Elections Canada may carry out studies on alternative voting methods and, with the approval of Parliament, test electronic voting processes for future use during electoral events.</p> <p>Our mission: Ensuring that Canadians can exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate.</p>
Canada – Elections Ontario	<p>Elections Ontario's mission is to guarantee the democratic voting rights of Ontario electors, assist in making the finances of political interests transparent and to ensure efficient, cost-effective and non-partisan administration of the electoral process.</p>
Georgia – Central Election Commission (CEC)	<p>The CEC is a public body; its mission is to be an independent arbiter and conduct the elections in accordance with the law. The election administration is not to be involved in the political discussions.</p>
Ghana – The Electoral Commission	<p>The Mission of the Electoral Commission is to advance the course of democracy and good governance for enhanced development of Ghana by institutionalizing free, fair and transparent elections to the acceptance of all stakeholders.</p>
India – State Election Commission	<p>To conduct elections to local bodies in a free and fair manner so that faith of the people in the democratic process is strengthened.</p>
Lesotho – Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)	<p>The Commission works towards the continuous development and improvement of relationships, which create an enabling environment for the promotion of the delivery of regular and acceptable elections and referenda, which are timely, participatory and accessible to all.</p>
Malawi – Electoral Commission (MEC)	<p>To conduct free, fair, credible and cost effective elections on a regular basis as required by the Constitution.</p>

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	EMB's MISSION STATEMENT:
New Zealand – Electoral Commission (Elections New Zealand)	<p>The Electoral Commission is an independent component of New Zealand’s electoral administration, accountable to parliament. In meeting our statutory guardianship obligations we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance the quality of democracy by making electoral matters relevant for all people and providing information and education to enable people to be electorally effective.</li> <li>• Encourage others to promote active, informed social participation focused on electoral matters.</li> <li>• Assist political parties to meet their statutory requirements and entitlements.</li> <li>• Work collegially with other electoral entities, parliament and government to ensure a seamless service to our users.</li> </ul>
Nigeria – Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	<p>The Mission of the Independent National Electoral Commission is to provide credible and efficient electoral services that are consistent with principles of equity, justice and fair play for building of a strong and viable democracy in Nigeria.</p>
Pakistan – Election Commission (ECP)	<p>To organize free, fair and impartial elections through enhancing its organizational capacity; preparing and maintaining credible electoral rolls; delimiting constituencies in a transparent manner; encouraging voters’ participation; and building constructive relationships with all stakeholders, thus introducing comprehensive electoral reforms in Pakistan.</p>
Papua New Guinea – Electoral Commission (PNGEC)	<p>The Mission of the Electoral Commission is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give the Nation fair election boundaries and an honest, skilled, and independent election administration that gives Papua New Guineans confidence in the election service and system, meets their needs and encourages them to take part in the democratic process of elections, and</li> <li>• Improve and strengthen the Papua New Guinea election system and develop the ability of Electoral Commission staff to deliver an independent election service.</li> </ul>
Sierra Leone – National Electoral Commission (NEC)	<p>The NEC is a public institution, whose mission is to organize, conduct and supervise all public elections and referenda, register all eligible voters, demarcate constituency boundaries and make regulations for the efficient performance of its functions.</p> <p>The NEC also seeks to impartially serve all stakeholders in the electoral process, and to undertake voter education programs for the citizens of Sierra Leone as a means of promoting and sustaining democracy and good governance.</p>

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	EMB's MISSION STATEMENT:
South Africa – Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)	The Electoral Commission is an independent and impartial permanent body created by the Constitution to promote and strengthen constitutional democracy in South Africa through the delivery of free and fair elections at all levels of government.
Tanzania – National Electoral Commission (NEC)	To safeguard democracy and maintain the integrity of Electoral System in the country by coordinating and supervising voter registration, constituency demarcation and election related activities that are supported by partnership with all stakeholders
Uganda – Electoral Commission (EC)	The mission of the Electoral Commission is to organize and conduct regular, free and fair elections and referenda in professionally, impartially and efficiently.
United States – Federal Election Commission (FEC)	The mission of the FEC is to assure that the campaign finance process is fully disclosed and that the rules are effectively and fairly enforced, fostering the electorate's faith in the integrity of the nation's political process.
United States – Virginia State Board of Elections (SBE)	The SBE's mission is to promote and ensure uniformity, legality, fairness, accuracy, purity and integrity of the vote in all elections in the Commonwealth.

## Vision Statements:

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	EMB's VISION DEFINITION:
Afghanistan – Independent Election Commission (IEC)	Our Vision is to strengthen the new established democracy of Afghanistan through conducting free and fair elections, striving for quality and accountability in delivering electoral services and promoting Afghans trust and confidence on electoral process, building a sustainable organization with the ability to deliver elections independently.
Australia – Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)	Our vision is to be recognized as an organization that provides excellence in the management and delivery of electoral services.
Australia – Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC)	To deliver quality, innovative and accountable electoral services every time for all Western Australians.
Botswana – Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)	The IEC exists to facilitate the formation of democratically elected government by delivering transparent, free and fair elections in accordance with established legal framework for Botswana and internationally accepted principles and standards.
Canada – Elections BC (British Columbia)	To be leaders in electoral administration.

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	EMB's VISION DEFINITION:
Canada – Elections Canada	An accessible electoral framework that Canadians trust and use.
Canada – Elections Ontario	<p>Elections Ontario's vision is to set the standard for electoral process excellence. Our vision includes 5 key elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder confidence: Ontario stakeholders have the utmost confidence in the integrity of their electoral process.</li> <li>• Rationalization of the Electoral Process: Elections Ontario strives to reduce duplication and overlap between electoral jurisdictions.</li> <li>• Reshaped Legislative Framework: Elections Ontario works with Ontario legislators to re-shape the legislative framework to better serve the interests of Ontario's electors.</li> <li>• Partnerships and Sharing of Tools and Expertise: Elections Ontario works proactively with other stakeholders and jurisdictions to develop and share cost-effective, innovative and leading edge tools and expertise.</li> <li>• Setting the Standard in Terms of Key Benchmarks: Elections Ontario's election delivery sets the standard in terms of key benchmarks, such as cost per eligible elector, time per elector visit, client satisfaction, financial reporting and disclosure.</li> </ul>
Ghana – The Electoral Commission	The vision of the Electoral Commission is to become an institution that is adequately resourced, staffed with professionally trained and highly motivated personnel, totally independent in the performance of its functions and dedicated to the efficient delivery of transparent, free, fair and incontrovertible elections as a contribution to good governance.
Kazakhstan – Central Electoral Commission	To undertake fair, genuine and free elections and referendum based on universal and equal suffrage, providing freedom of electors voting and guarantees of electoral rights realization and freedom of electoral process participants in the Republic of Kazakhstan.
Lesotho – Independent Electoral Commission	The Independent Electoral Commission Lesotho will contribute to the strengthening of a peaceful, stable and prosperous nation through sustainable inclusive democracy.
Malawi – Electoral Commission (MEC)	The MEC is an impartial statutory body that aims to contribute to the democratization and social-political stability in Malawi.
New Zealand – Electoral Commission (Elections New Zealand)	Our Vision is that New Zealand's electoral framework and processes are widely used, understood, trusted and valued.

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	EMB's VISION DEFINITION:
Nigeria – Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	The vision of the INEC is to facilitate the realization of a dynamic, formidable and independent organization, committed to the institutionalization of an enduring democracy which allows for an effective and smooth political change.
Pakistan – Election Commission (ECP)	To fulfill its Constitutional obligation of holding free, fair and impartial elections in an effective, credible, transparent and independent manner; meeting the aspirations of the nation for a strong democracy in Pakistan.
Papua New Guinea – Electoral Commission	The Vision of the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission is to: Produce a good Common Roll of registered voters by enrolling every Papua New Guinean who is qualified to vote in the National and Local Level Government Elections held every five years; and Organize independent, democratic elections so every qualified Papua New Guinean has the free and fair chance to vote or be elected to public office.
Sierra Leone – National Electoral Commission (NEC)	Our vision of the NEC in the future is that of an independent, credible and well-resourced institution which promotes democracy and good governance by continually administering elections in such a manner that the results are acceptable to all.
South Africa – Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)	To strengthen constitutional democracy through the delivery of free and fair elections in which every voter is able to record his or her informed choice.
Tanzania – National Electoral Commission	To be an efficient organization that strengthens democracy, through delivery of free, fair and trustworthy, presidential and parliamentary in URT and councilor's election in mainland.
United Kingdom – Electoral Commission	Integrity and public confidence in the UK's democratic process.
United States – Virginia State Board of Elections (SBE)	Integrity of the vote, that's our motto. Voting is the most fundamental freedom of Virginia citizens; it is the backbone of a free and democratic society. We envision SBE as the public's guardian of freedom within a democratic society. As good guardians, we protect and serve the integrity of the vote. SBE sets and upholds the standards and practices that provide voters with the highest level of confidence that elections in Virginia are fair, unbiased, orderly and secure. Integrity of the vote, electorate confidence and easy access to the electoral processes are key elements to ensuring that every eligible citizen has an opportunity to vote and, to have that vote counted.



### Guiding Principles Statements:

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	EMB's GUIDING PRINCIPLES DEFINITION:
New Zealand – Election Commission	Independence; Neutrality; Service to voters, candidates and parties; Professionalism; Responsibility and accountability; Creativity; Ethic of Care; Responsiveness; Public Service; Outcome focused.
Nigeria – Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	The Commission shall demonstrate high moral standards, honesty, accountability and integrity in the discharge of the responsibilities bestowed on it by the relevant constitutional provisions and the electoral law and regulations.
Pakistan – Election Commission (ECP)	<p>The following guiding principles reflect overall philosophy of the ECP, setting moral and professional standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independence: The ECP will strengthen its independent status under the Constitution, laws and rules by rendering services that are expected of it.</li> <li>• Impartiality: The ECP will always be nonpartisan and fair in all its decisions and functions.</li> <li>• Transparency: The ECP will have transparency in its policies and actions, and will ensure that the stakeholders have access to relevant information.</li> <li>• Inclusion of Marginalized Groups: The ECP will always endeavor to create favorable conditions for women, minorities and persons with disabilities with regard to the electoral process.</li> <li>• Professional Excellence: The ECP will ensure to have qualified and competent staff in order to organize and conduct credible elections.</li> <li>• Conducive Working Conditions: The ECP will always endeavor to create dignified working conditions and deal with its staff in a fair manner.</li> </ul>

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	EMB's GUIDING PRINCIPLES DEFINITION:
<p>Sierra Leone – National Electoral Commission</p>	<p>In the attempt to attain our mission and vision, the principles that guide NEC are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independence: The commission will ensure that it operates freely in its own best judgment, without taking directives from or being controlled by any person or authority.</li> <li>• Transparency: The commission will be open at all times in dealing with all stakeholders in the electoral process.</li> <li>• Credibility: The commission will endeavor to win the confidence and trust of all Sierra Leoneans and the international community through the quality of its services.</li> <li>• Impartiality: The commission will always be non-partisan and fair in all its activities.</li> <li>• Professionalism and dedication: The commission will endeavor to have well-trained, professionally competent and self-confident staff, dedicated to the delivery of trustworthy elections.</li> <li>• Integrity: The commission will carry out its activities in an honest and truthful manner, and will take all reasonable measures to prevent willful wrongdoing by its officials.</li> <li>• Accountability: The commission will take full responsibility for its actions and always be answerable to the people of Sierra Leone and its partners.</li> </ul>
<p>South Africa – Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)</p>	<p>To enable the Commission to serve the needs of stakeholders, including the electorate, political parties, the media and permanent and temporary staff, the organization subscribes to the following organizational values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following best practices: Stopping all forms of waste; Driving for results and success; Planning and working so as to maximize the use of all inputs.</li> <li>• Being sensitive to race, culture, language, religion, disability and gender issues: Taking note of diversity in experience and ability; Caring and showing respect for others.</li> <li>• Being ethical, honest and truthful: Communicating in an open and honest way; Carrying out our work independently and impartially; Acting with integrity and opposing corruption; Promoting the image and credibility of the Electoral Commission.</li> <li>• Improving continuously: Maximizing training and development opportunities; Supporting and inspiring each other; Fostering collaboration between teams and team members; Fostering achievement of common goals.</li> </ul>

<p>United Kingdom – Electoral Commission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair – we are fair in the way we treat each other and the people and organizations we deal with.</li> <li>• Impartial – we are impartial in our decisions and actions.</li> <li>• Transparent – we are transparent about how we work.</li> </ul>
<p>United States – Virginia State Board of Elections (VSBE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Trust and Confidence: It is our duty to protect and promote public trust and confidence by our conduct of accurate and fair elections.</li> <li>• Equitable Access: It is our commitment to ensure uniform and equitable access to electoral processes.</li> <li>• Customer Service Focus: We believe that providing friendly, timely and quality services to our customers adds value and confidence to electoral processes in Virginia.</li> <li>• Integrity: We stand for the principle of striving to prove every vote truly counts and is counted, fully and accurately and properly.</li> <li>• Innovative Thinking: We have a genuine willingness to try new things to bring the best possible service to the Virginia electorate and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Democratic elections: Elections are the central institution of democratic representative governments. Why? Because, in a democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed. The principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the holding of free and fair elections.</li> </ul>

## EXISTING STRATEGIC PLANS

The following list catalogues and provides links to a sampling of strategic plans from election management bodies from around the world.

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODY:	LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN:
Afghanistan – Independent Election Commission (IEC)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/afghanistan-iec-strategic-plan-2006/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/afghanistan-iec-strategic-plan-2006/</a>
Australia – Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/australian-electoral-commission-corporate-plan/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/australian-electoral-commission-corporate-plan/</a>
Canada – Elections Canada	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/elections-canada-strategic-plan/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/elections-canada-strategic-plan/</a>
Georgia – Central Election Commission (CEC)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/georgia-strategy-of-the-cec-2010-2011/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/georgia-strategy-of-the-cec-2010-2011/</a>
New Zealand – Election Commission	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/new-zealand-chief-electoral-offices-plan/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/new-zealand-chief-electoral-offices-plan/</a>
Nigeria – Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/nigeria-charter-of-the-independent-national/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/nigeria-charter-of-the-independent-national/</a>
Northern Ireland – Electoral Office for Northern Ireland	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/northern-ireland-electoral-office-business-plan/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/northern-ireland-electoral-office-business-plan/</a>
Ontario – Elections Ontario	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/ontario-elections-commission-strategic-plan/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/ontario-elections-commission-strategic-plan/</a>
Pakistan – Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)	<a href="http://ecp.gov.pk/sp/">http://ecp.gov.pk/sp/</a>
Rwanda – National Electoral Commission (NEC)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/rwanda-national-electoral-commission-action/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/rwanda-national-electoral-commission-action/</a>
Sierra Leone – National Electoral Commission (NEC)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/sierra-leone-strategic-plan/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/sierra-leone-strategic-plan/</a>
South Africa – Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/south-africa-independent-election-commission/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/south-africa-independent-election-commission/</a>
United Kingdom – Electoral Commission	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/united-kingdom-electoral-commission-corporate-plan/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/united-kingdom-electoral-commission-corporate-plan/</a>
United States – Federal Election Commission (FEC)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/united-states-federal-elections-commission/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/united-states-federal-elections-commission/</a>
Virginia State Board of Elections (VSBE)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/united-states-virginia-state-board-of-elections/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/united-states-virginia-state-board-of-elections/</a>
Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC)	<a href="http://aceproject.org/ero-en/western-australia-electoral-commission-strategic/">http://aceproject.org/ero-en/western-australia-electoral-commission-strategic/</a>

# Glossary

*The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.*  
*Michelangelo Buonarroti*

Terms used in strategic planning may be unfamiliar to those who are new to the process. Below is a list of the terms that have been used in this Guide together with their definition.

TERM:	DEFINITION:
Accountability	Accountability is the degree to which an individual accepts responsibility for his or her actions.
Action planning	The process of detailed planning at the departmental level of the EMB.
Activity	An identifiable and clearly defined task.
Brainstorming	A process where a small group of people, often from different departments or functions, meets and without any inhibition or preconceived notions puts forward ideas.
Continuous Improvement	This methodology looks for ways to make incremental improvements to a process. These are not necessarily radical changes.
Core Team	A 3- to 6-person team whose members are selected from the Strategic Planning Committee and have the overall responsibility of providing administrative, logistical and operational support to the Strategic Planning Committee throughout the steps of the Strategic Planning Cycle. This group also maintains efficiency in the process and ensures all tasks are achieved efficiently and in a timely manner.
Current Status	The EMB's current situation/context. The current status can be determined by conducting an internal and external organizational assessment and a SWOT exercise.
Desired future	This is how the EMB aspires to be/operate at a certain time in the future.
Electoral Cycle	An all-encompassing analytical approach with elections as a continuous process, rather than an isolated event. At the most general level, the electoral cycle is divided into three main periods: pre-electoral period, electoral period and post-electoral period.
Electoral event	An election, a referendum, or any process that involves voting operations.
Electoral Management Body (EMB)	An organization or a body established for the purpose of, and legally responsible for, managing one or more of the essential elements for the conduct of elections. EMBs have a variety of names, shapes and sizes. Names include "Election Commission," "Department of Elections," "Electoral Council," "Election Unit" or "Electoral Board." The term "electoral management body" or "EMB" has been coined as a name to refer to the body or bodies responsible for electoral management regardless of the nature of the wider institutional framework in place.
Electoral management	The procedural, administrative and operational process through which the EMB plans, organizes and delivers an election.

TERM:	DEFINITION:
Electoral Stakeholders	<p>Any person or group with a vested interest (or “stake”) in or having expectations of a certain level of performance or compliance from the organization, its strategic actions and corresponding activities. EMB stakeholders could be differentiated as follows.</p> <p>Internal stakeholders: the EMB’s constituents, such as its branches and subordinate offices at the local level (regional, provincial and municipal offices). External stakeholders: political parties and candidates; executive branches of the government; legislatures; electoral dispute resolution bodies; the judicial system; election monitors and domestic and international election observers; the media; the electorate (both actual voters and prospective voters); civil society organizations; local communities and minority groups; and the international donor community and electoral assistance providers.</p>
Envisioning	<p>The EMB “envisions” the strategic planning process, familiarizes itself with the methodology, appreciates its benefits and, in case it decides to engage in this process, sets out its commitment by acquiring the requisite ownership of the process. This occurs before Step 1 in the Strategic Planning Cycle.</p>
Event-driven approach	<p>As opposed to process-driven. This approach is when the attention of the electoral management (or electoral assistance) is entirely geared towards Election Day, without placing much consideration on what follows that event in the post-election period.</p>
Executive Management of the EMB	<p>The leadership of the EMB or its top executive management, depending on the EMB model. If the EMB is a “commission” with a technical “secretariat,” it refers to the chief commissioner, the other commissioners and head of the secretariat.</p>
External Organizational Assessment	<p>Analysis of key external elements or issues that affect the environment in which an organization functions.</p>
Gap Analysis	<p>The identification of the difference (or gap) between the current status of an organization and where it wants to go (desired future).</p>
Goal	<p>Goals are specific accomplishments that must be accomplished in total, or in some combination, in order to achieve some larger, overall result. Goals are the changes required by the organization to move from where it currently stands (the present) towards where it desires to be (the future).</p>
Guiding Principles	<p>The core values and philosophies that describe how the EMB conducts itself in carrying out its mission.</p>
Implementation Plan	<p>A detailed description of the strategies, actions and activities used to implement a strategic plan.</p>
Inputs	<p>Include resources such as raw materials, money, technologies and people.</p>

TERM:	DEFINITION:
Internal Organizational Assessment	Analysis of key internal components (such as organization's position, performance, problems, and potential) that are viewed as critical to the effective functioning of the organization.
Mission Statement	An enduring statement defining the purpose of the EMB. The mission statement describes what the organization does, who it does it for and how it does it.
Objectives	Specific and measurable targets for accomplishing goals. A factor the organization needs to measure and monitor to evaluate progress or impact.
Operational excellence	The achievement of standards exceeding the highest points of expectation, optimizing the use of available resources.
Outputs	Tangible results produced by processes in the system, such as reports or other documents.
Ownership	Ownership is a requisite for guaranteeing that the strategic planning exercise and the written plan are suitable, strictly relevant and closely customized to the specific context of the local environment to which they pertain.
Performance indicators	A set of agreed measures of critical success factors reflecting the progress towards the achievement of a specific activity.
Planning Assumptions	Expectations concerning future trends or events that could significantly impact the organization's performance and delivery of services.
Post-election period	The post-election period is the segment of the electoral cycle that normally encompasses the timeframe from completion of an election event to the beginning of preparatory activities and operations for the next electoral event.
Proactive planning approach	As opposed to a reactive planning approach; a proactive planning approach enables the EMB to think strategically and identify potential problems before they occur, so that they effectively pre-empt problems by putting in place appropriate measures.
Process-driven approach	As opposed to an event-driven, it is when the attention of the electoral management (or of electoral assistance) is shifted from the electoral event per se (Election Day) and instead places attention on the electoral cycle as a whole.
Reactive planning approach	As opposed to a proactive planning approach, it is a poor planning approach when the EMB acts on known and unanticipated problems once they are already occurring and when, normally, it is too late to solve these problems in an efficient, transparent, cost-effective and permanent manner.
Resource Allocation	The determination and allotment of resources or assets necessary to carry out an organization's strategies and achieve objectives within a set of organizational priorities.

TERM:	DEFINITION:
Resources	Includes finances, human resources and their time, materials, services, facilities, means of transport, commodities, technologies, etc., required to implement strategies or processes.
Strategic Actions	An efficiently targeted activity that needs to be implemented in order to attain a specific objective.
Strategic Activities	Specific tasks needed to achieve the strategic actions.
Strategic Foundations	Define the organization's mission, vision and guiding principles, where the organization wants to go (its future).
Strategic Management	The overall framework within which policy development, strategic/ quality planning, operational planning and budgeting, capital outlay planning and budgeting, program implementation, program evaluation and accountability take place.
Strategic Pillar	Key strategic area whose fulfillment will enable the strategy of the organization to happen. Pillars are concerns of critical importance to the EMB which often impact several or all of the activities and functions of the organization.
Strategic Plan	A practical, action-oriented guide based on an examination of internal and external factors that directs goal-setting and resource allocation to achieve meaningful results over time.
Strategic Planning Committee	It has as the overall responsibility of defining the overall strategic direction for the EMB, analyzing documents, providing recommendations to the EMB's Executive Management that are consistent with the Strategic Plan, monitoring progress and reviewing results.
Strategic Planning Cycle	A recurring and revolving strategic planning process that unfolds through the implementation of a systemic and sequential methodology.
Strategic Planning	A systematic planning methodology that, over a defined period of time, facilitates the effective management of a process.
Strategy Definition stage	Through this stage, the EMB defines its strategic direction, envisioning where its current position is, what its desired future is, and how to actually get there.
Strategy Deployment stage	Through this stage, the EMB translates the vision for its strategic direction into a detailed plan of action determining in detail how it will reach its desired future.
Strategy Execution stage	Through this stage, the EMB implements monitors and evaluates all activities comprising its plan of actions.
Strategy	An overarching, long-term plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal.
SWOT Analysis	A management planning tool that attempts to match the internal strengths and the weaknesses of the organization with external opportunities and threats.
Tasks	Particularly in small organizations, people are assigned various tasks required to implement the plan. If the scope of the plan is very small, tasks and activities are often essentially the same.
Vision statement	An idealized view of what the organization envisages being in the future.



# Annexes

*Keep your eyes  
on the stars and  
your feet on the  
ground.*

*Franklin D. Roosevelt*

## FURTHER READING

- Strategic Planning for Election Organisations: A Practical Guide for Conducting a Strategic Planning Exercise. Joe C. Baxter, 1999.
- Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: a Practical Guide and Workbook. Michael J. Allison and Jude Kaye, 1997.
- Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement, 4th Edition. John M. Bryson, 2011.
- Electoral Management Design: The International IDEA Handbook. International IDEA, 2006.
- Project Management : Strategic Design and Implementation, 4th Edition -David I. Cleland, Lewis R. Ireland - Published by McGraw-Hill Professional - June 2002.

## USEFUL INTERNET LINKS

- ACE Electoral Knowledge Network: Strategic Planning as defined in the Electoral Management topic area of the ACE Encyclopedia. <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/eme/eme05?toc>
- Electoral Management Design: The International IDEA Handbook. [http://www.idea.int/publications/register.cfm?title=Electoral%20Management%20Design%3A%20The%20International%20IDEA%20Handbook&forwardUrl=/publications/emd/upload/EMD\\_inlay\\_final.pdf&req=1](http://www.idea.int/publications/register.cfm?title=Electoral%20Management%20Design%3A%20The%20International%20IDEA%20Handbook&forwardUrl=/publications/emd/upload/EMD_inlay_final.pdf&req=1)
- Strategic Planning and Strategic Management: What are they and how are they different? Publication of USAID's Implementing Policy Change Project: [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/democracy\\_and\\_governance/publications/ipc/tn-1.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/publications/ipc/tn-1.pdf)
- The Free Management Library(sm): All About Strategic Planning: <http://managementhelp.org/strategicplanning/index.htm>

## SAMPLE CURRICULUM FOR A STRATEGIC PLANNING SEMINAR

Below is provided a sample curriculum for a Strategic Planning Seminar that could be used for the initial induction meeting of the EMB Executive Management, Department Managers and other select staff in implementing Step 0: Envisioning.

DAY 1		DAY 2		DAY 3	
Theme: Context & Introduction		Theme: Methodology & Practice		Theme: Evaluation & Action	
Learning Objective: Participants gain knowledge about the benefits of strategic planning for election in their context.		Learning Objective: Participants gain knowledge of the various steps in strategic planning preparation for elections.		Learning Objective: Learn lessons from other countries' strategic planning experience and apply these to the local context. Understand the importance of ongoing commitment and an action plan.	
SESSION	OBJECTIVE	SESSION	OBJECTIVE	SESSION	OBJECTIVE
Session 1: Strategic planning in the perspective of the EMB undertaking this effort	Participants understand the arrangements and procedures for the preparation of strategic planning, knowing the limits of innovation in the preparation of strategic planning.	Session 8: Overview for Strategic planning Cycle	Participants know the all the steps of the cycle for strategic planning preparation.	Session 17: Pakistan's experience in developing a Strategic Plan	Participants learn lessons from the experience of Pakistan Election Commission in preparing the strategic planning.

SESSION	OBJECTIVE	SESSION	OBJECTIVE	SESSION	OBJECTIVE
Session 2: Global perspective of Election Implementation trends and challenges	Participants learn the experience of other State Election Commission in the use of strategic planning for the election.	Session 9: Plan	Participants understand the cycle step “plan” in strategic planning.	Session 18: Discussion on commitment to adopt new method of strategic planning development	Participants compare the current strategic planning and new method of strategic planning preparation. They also consider if and how they would adopt and disseminate new methods for preparing strategic planning.
Session 3: Reactive planning vs. proactive planning	Participants know the character of strategic planning.	Session 10: Define	Participants understand of the cycle step “define” in strategic planning.	Session 19: Writing Action Plan	Participants develop an action plan for adopting and disseminating this new methodology on strategic planning.
Session 4: What is Strategic planning?	Participants understand the definition of strategic planning.	Session 11: Assess	Participants understand the cycle step “Assess” in strategic planning.	Session 20: Declaration of commitment	Participants declare commitment to adopt and disseminate new methods of strategic planning preparation.

SESSION	OBJECTIVE	SESSION	OBJECTIVE	SESSION	OBJECTIVE
Session 5: What is not Strategic planning?	Participants are able to distinguish which process is not included strategic planning	Session 12: Identify	Participants understand the cycle step "Identify" in strategic planning.	Workshop Evaluation	Verbally ask participants to express what was useful and what could be improved.
Session 6: Benefits of strategic planning to Election Administrations	Participants understand the benefit of strategic planning for the EMB.	Session 13: Consult	Participants understand the cycle step "consult" in strategic planning.	Closing Ceremony	Award certificates to those who have attended the complete course.
Session 7: Strategic planning Exercise: Requirements and Risks	Participants understand the key requirements of strategic planning and the key risk for not using strategic planning.	Session 14: Strategize	Participants understand the cycle step "Strategize" in strategic planning.		
		Session 15: Deploy	Participants understand the cycle step "deploy" in strategic planning.		
		Session 16: Execute	Participants understand the cycle step "execute" in strategic planning.		



