



Embracing Strategic Planning in Times of Rapid Change April 2025

The only thing that stays the same is change.

This old truism is attributed to the Ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, who pre-dates Socrates. Heraclitus expressed the idea with this mental image:

“No one steps in the same stream twice.”

Change is always with us. If we accept that notion, and we must, then we should accept and embrace change and work on our adaptability.

For nonprofits the stream we are currently wading in has become the raging rapids and we’re being carried along and tossed about in the turbulence. Nonprofit leaders may be thinking that planning isn’t possible right now, while so much is changing so quickly. When Mark Valli, CEO of [NORWESCAP](#), a nonprofit community action agency in Northwest New Jersey, revealed the organization’s new strategic plan in March 2025, he addressed this faulty perception head-on in his remarks, stating:

“How can you address change if you don't have a plan?” And, “What better way to navigate rough waters than to have a compass.”

He assured his audience that the plan will help NORWESCAP to stay focused on the organization’s goals, keeping their “eyes on the prize.” He promised, “Whatever comes at us, we’ll be ready.”

Planning has never been more critical for nonprofits – especially now when the pace of change is swift. Setting and holding to a guiding vision and well-considered direction is absolutely essential for nonprofit leaders to make the myriad short- and long-term decisions they face every day, whether the pace of change is gentle or brisk.

Some perceive strategic planning as a static exercise where we must assume that nothing much will change in the next three years. That kind of planning doesn’t fit the times we live in, or any time in the past. Remember Heraclitus? Luckily, strategic planning doesn’t have to be static.

Smart strategic planning accepts and embraces the reality of change, attempts to anticipate the pace and direction of change, envisions a future where the organization’s mission is fully expressed, and charts a course toward that desirable future state. It identifies indicators that can be tracked to know quickly whether the organization is progressing in the desired direction, and it prompts leaders to adjust course as necessary.

Smart strategic planning also helps us truly understand the organization, particularly its “secret sauce” – the quality or approach that has underpinned our success all along – so that leaders can select strategies that make the most of that quality. It helps us select a “big hairy audacious goal” or “B-HAG” that functions as a 10-year vision and acts as a compass by which everyone working within and on behalf of the organization can steer. We need this purpose and direction now, more than ever, when the raging current threatens to carry us wherever it will.

Nonprofits face choice points every day. In times like these, we have to address more choice points more frequently than ever. How will your nonprofit make these decisions? Based on your gut? Will you do what’s familiar, i.e., what you’ve always done?

The choices nonprofit leaders make will be better choices if they are:

- based on a thorough understanding of the organization, including its “secret sauce;”
- guided by a 10-year BHAG-style vision (“eyes on the prize”); and,
- using planning tools developed specifically for their organization to help its leaders evaluate and select the strategies they need to respond to the new challenges and opportunities they are confronting.

The approach to strategic planning used by Spark Nonprofit Consulting is grounded in the research-based approach developed specifically for nonprofit organizations by David La Piana and detailed in his [book](#), *“The Nonprofit Strategy Revolution: Real-Time Strategic Planning in a Rapid-Response World.”* That’s the world nonprofits are operating in today. While constant change has always been the reality, nonprofits need strategic planning tools and support now more than ever.

Spark Nonprofit Consulting is experienced in facilitating strategic planning using the La Piana approach. If you think we can help you, please [contact us](#).

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