



# The 5 Keys to Creating Strategic Plans that Work

by Dennis Maher, Market Development Executive for ClearGov

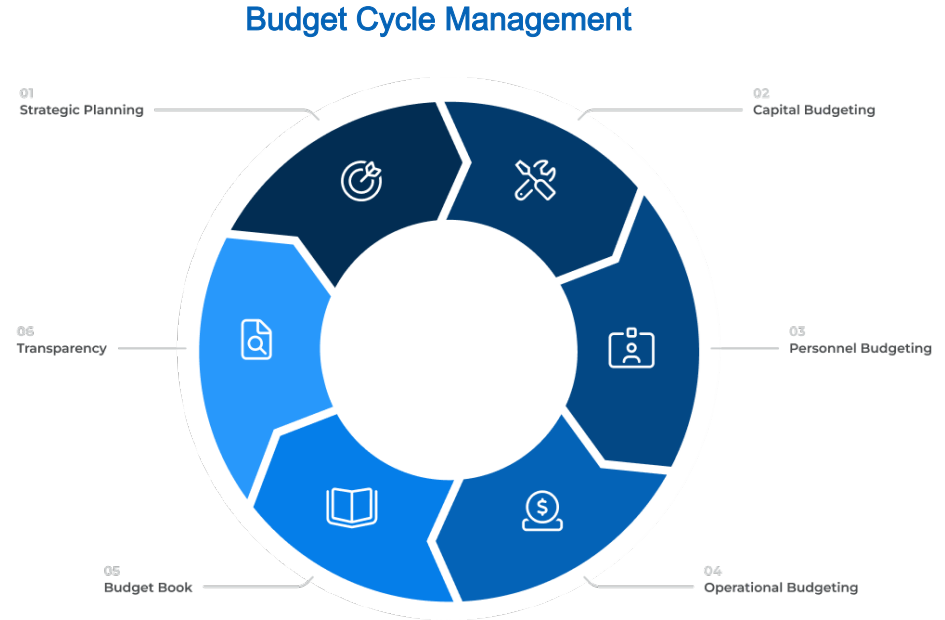
# Foreword

This presentation leverages concepts from the GFOA's "Rethinking Strategic Planning" article, as well as leading strategic planning consultants and ClearGov clients.



# Why Strategic Planning?

1. **Strategic Planning should be the foundation of any budget.** We are uniquely positioned to connect strategic planning to the budget.
2. **Most agencies do a good job creating their plan, but many do a poor job executing their plan.** We see an opportunity to not only reinvent how plans are created and communicated, but also how agencies manage the execution of their plan.



# Why are Strategic Plans So Important?

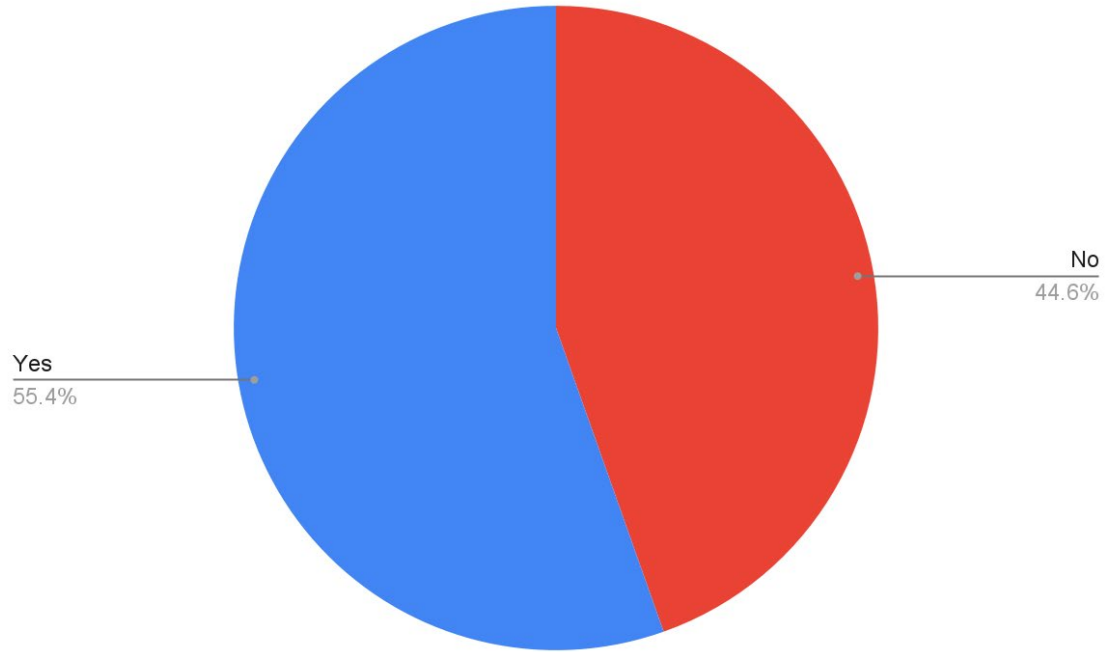
- Clearly communicate to residents your vision for their community and how their tax dollars are providing value.
- Aligns internal stakeholders to support your vision and get things done.
- Move beyond “reactive tactical mode” to “proactive strategic mode.”
- Help build community trust in an environment where trust is eroding.



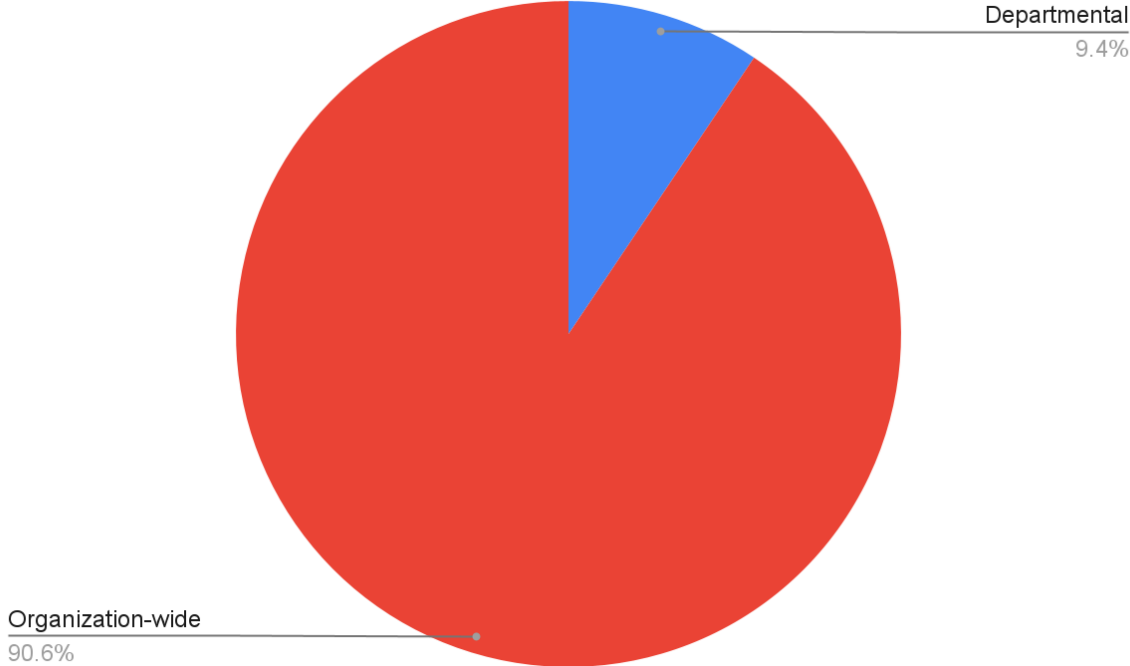
## Poll #1

**Do you have a recent,  
organization -wide Strategic Plan?**

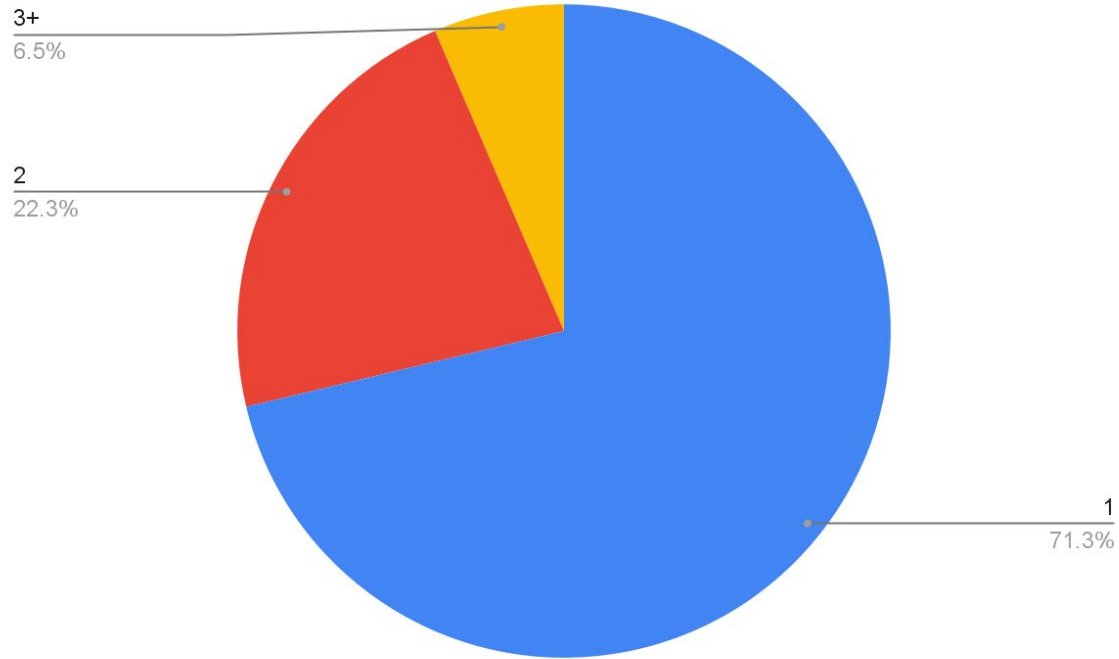
# Did we find a plan?



# What kind of plan did we find?

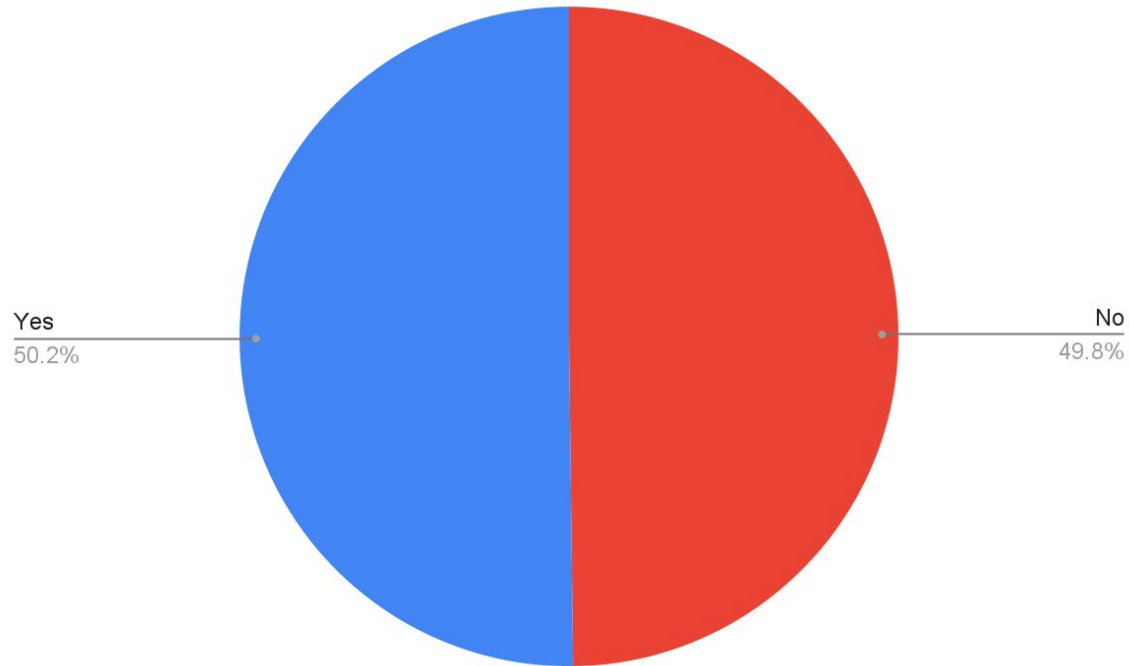


# How many plans were findable per organization?

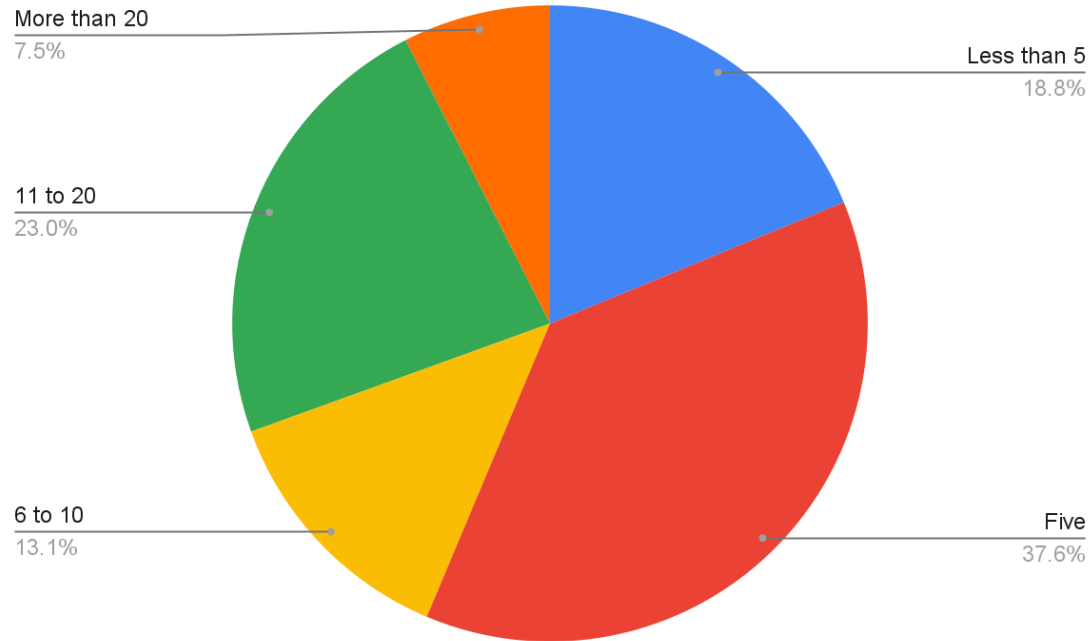




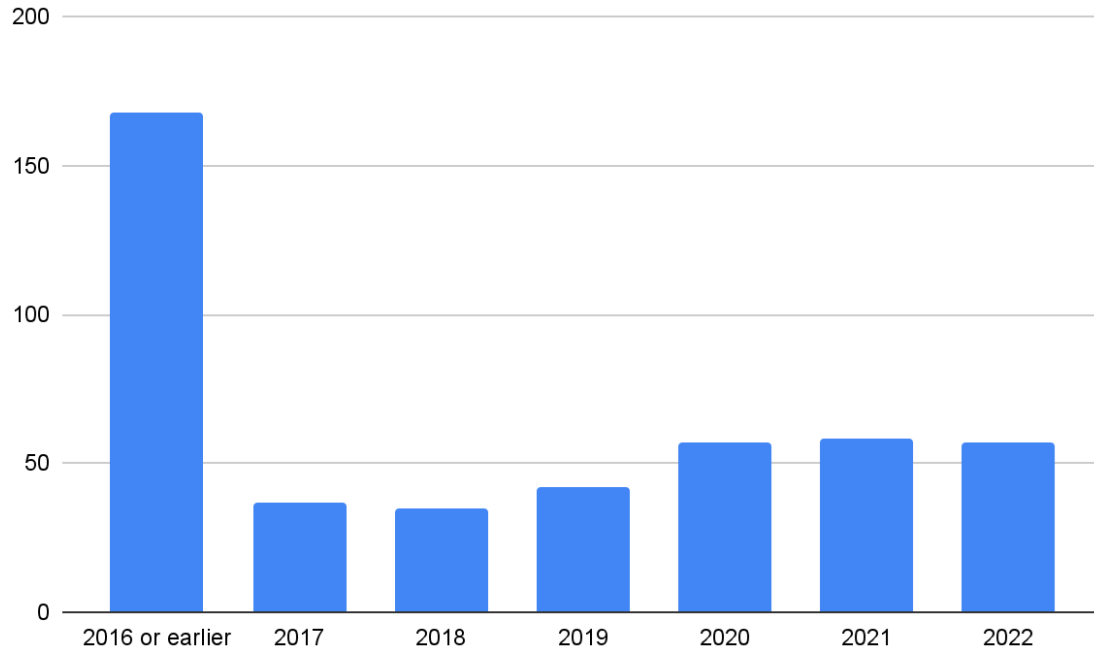
# Did we find an organization-wide plan?



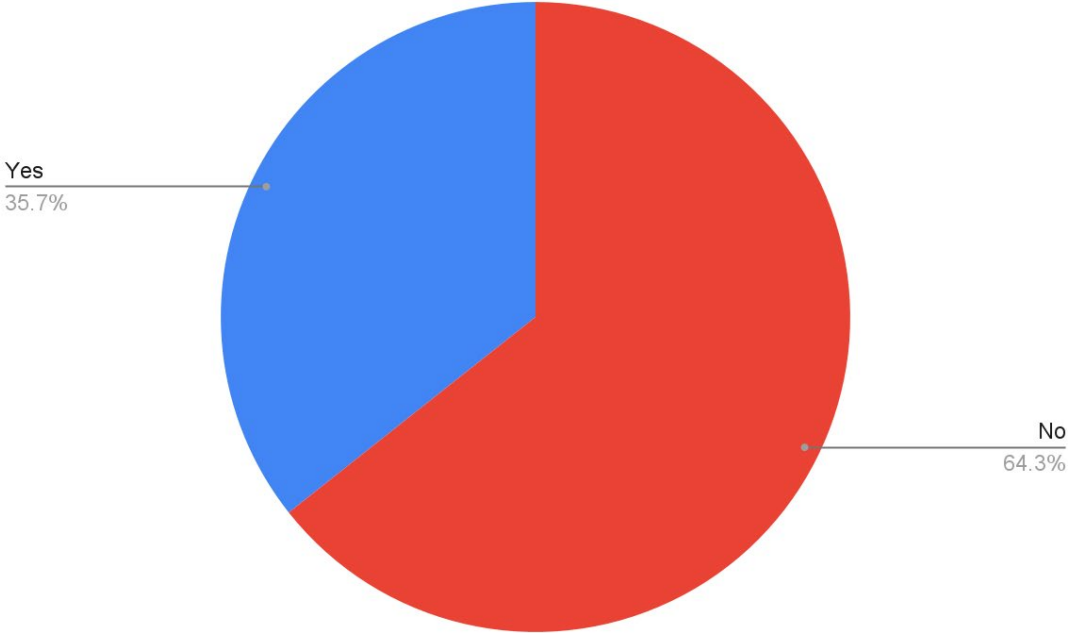
# How many years do these plans cover?



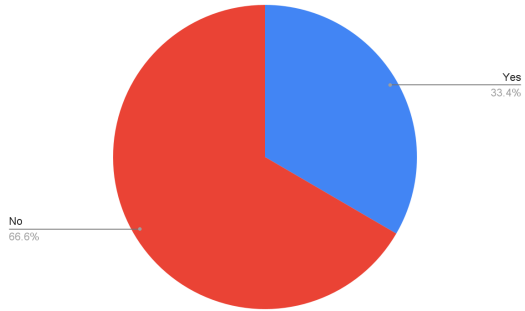
# What year was the plan we found created in?



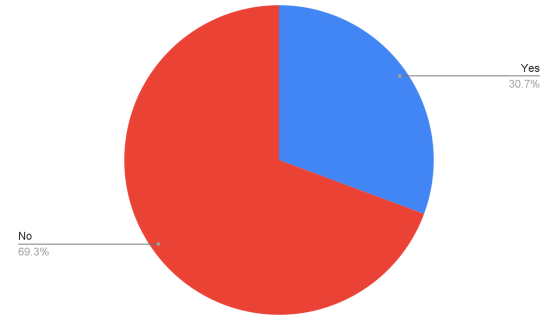
# Are there recent, organization-wide plans?



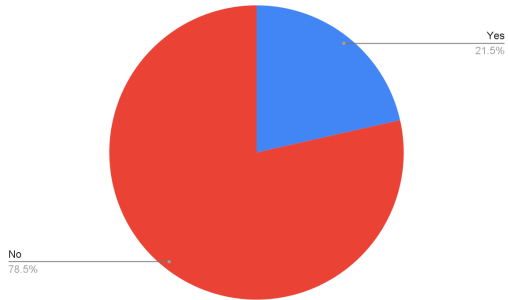
## Municipalities



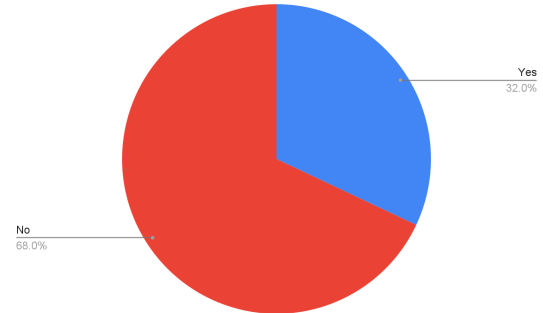
## Special districts



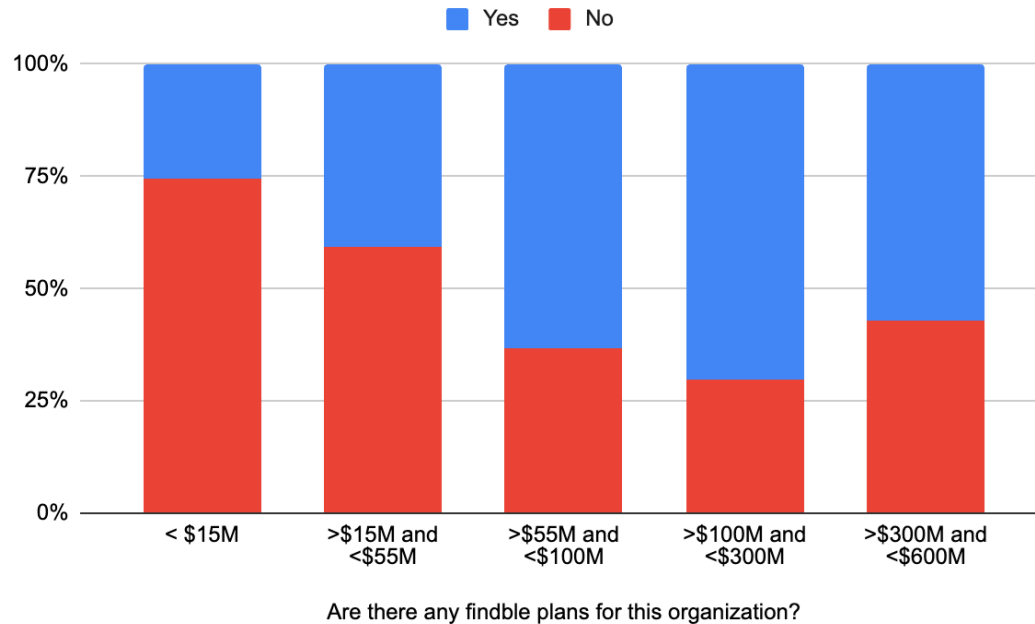
## Counties



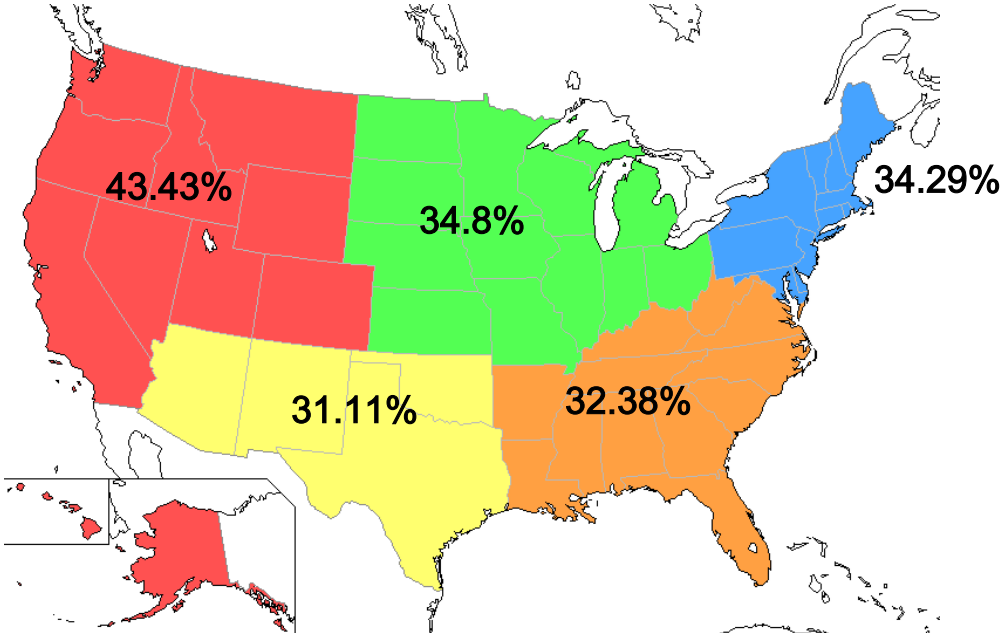
## School districts



# Recent, organization-wide plans by budget size



# Recent, organization-wide plans by region



## Poll #2

# If you do not have a Strategic Plan, why not?

- A) There is not enough internal support.
- B) We don't have the budget for a consultant to help build the plan.
- C) We don't know where to start.
- D) We want to build a plan, but we've just been dragging our feet for no good reason!

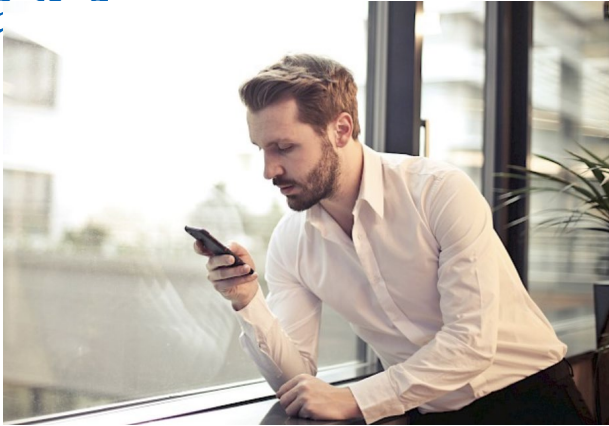


# The Traditional Approach to Strategic Planning



- Follow prescribed steps (e.g. develop a vision statement, SWOT analysis, etc.)
- Establish goals at the executive level
- State the plan, but don't update with progress metrics (“Checking the box”)
- Progress is revisited (maybe) once a year with department heads and budget team
- Communicate as a dense printed book and/or PDF

# The Five Keys to Modern Strategic Planning



1. *Build Consensus through Collaboration*
2. *Keep It Simple & Focused*
3. *Stay Flexible & Adapt*
4. *Bring the Plan to Life*
5. *“Connect the Dots” to the Budget*

# Build Consensus through Collaboration

- **Phase 1: Gather open -ended input on most important issues**
  - Get the community involved in setting the vision - what's important for your customers?
  - If more people are involved, the more vested they will be in supporting the desired outcomes.
  - Make sure input is inclusive of different stakeholder perspectives, ages, races, income -levels, etc..
  - Open -ended input to define focus areas.
  - Hold public meetings or host open office hours.
- **Phase 2: Analyze open -ended input to find common themes**
  - Use tools such as ZenCity to identify common themes on social media
- **Phase 3: Survey to prioritize themes**
  - Leverage modern survey tools, such as Survey Monkey, Facebook or Polco.



# Build Consensus through Collaboration

- **Phase 4: Develop goals and measurable action items for each goal**
- **Phase 5: Implement action plan and track/communicate progress**
  - Communicate the planning process before & after
  - Gather feedback AFTER the plan is launched too!
  - Communicate that the plan will be refined over time!



# Keep It Simple & Focused

- **Divide the plan into 3 levels; anything more is hard to digest, anything less is too vague.**
  - Focus Areas - What themes are most important?
  - Goals - What are the major goals within these themes?
  - Action Items - How will the team achieve the goals?
- **Focus Areas should not be functional areas, but rather overarching strategic goals that reach across and unite departments.**
  - “Public Works” vs. “Create a Welcoming Downtown”
- **Action Items should be measurable and “completeable”**
  - State whether Action Items are one time or recurring; if recurring, ensure metrics are updated regularly.
  - State who is responsible for Action Items (Department and Owner Name)
  - Not all action items have a scientific way to measure...and that’s OK!
- **Communicate the plan in a way that everyone can quickly understand and access**
  - Top level “Key Performance Areas” should be broad, so readers can quickly find what interests them the most
  - Keeps the audience in mind; don’t use acronym soup if most residents won’t know what the acronyms stand for
  - Mobile is critical for today’s “consumers”

# Keep It Simple & Focused

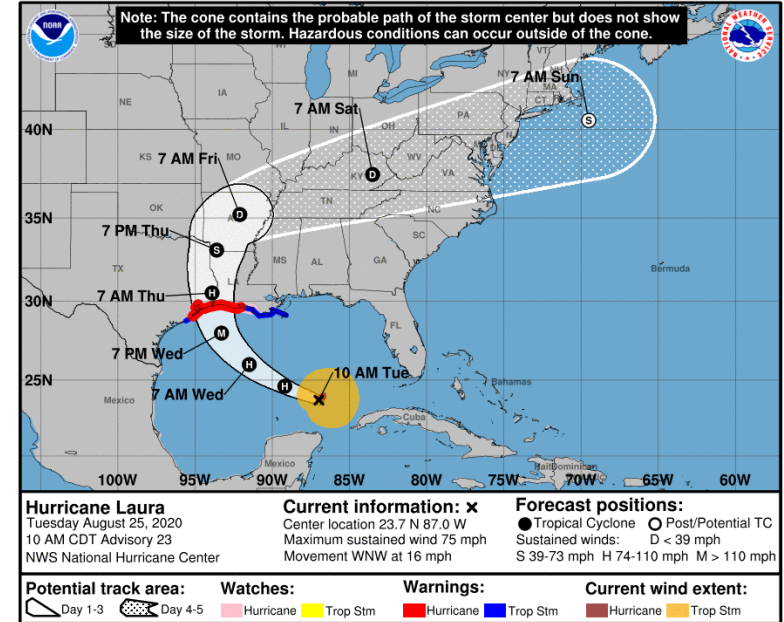
- Don't try to cover too much; not every department needs to be part of the plan; don't choke trying to eat the hamburger whole
- Introduce constraints - A local government only has so much capacity; can't tackle everything
  - Is their political support for the goal? Will it gain funding?
  - Is their operation capacity to achieve the goal?
  - Will the goal provide positive public value for the cost?
- *The more focused an issue is the easier it is to connect to a budget request.*
- Problem definition is just as important as problem solving. Use the "Five Why's" to get to the root of a problem.
  - *What's driving crime rates?*
    - Is the problem too many guns on the street?
    - Or is the problem that education system is failing?
    - More specifically do graduation rates correlate with crime rates?
    - Even deeper, do reading at grade level rates correlate with graduation rates?

## KEY #3

# Stay Flexible & Adapt

## “Agile Strategic Planning”

- Much of the private sector, especially technology, has moved to “Agile Methodologies.”
- Plan ahead, but heed the “Cone of Uncertainty”
  - We can predict the near future (next 3 months) with good accuracy, but as we get further out (3 to 6+ months) it becomes more difficult to predict when features will be released as we adjust to changing priorities.
- Update the long term vision infrequently, but we re-prioritize goals often.
  - Plans must be able to adapt over time and adjust to the unforeseen (e.g. COVID -19).





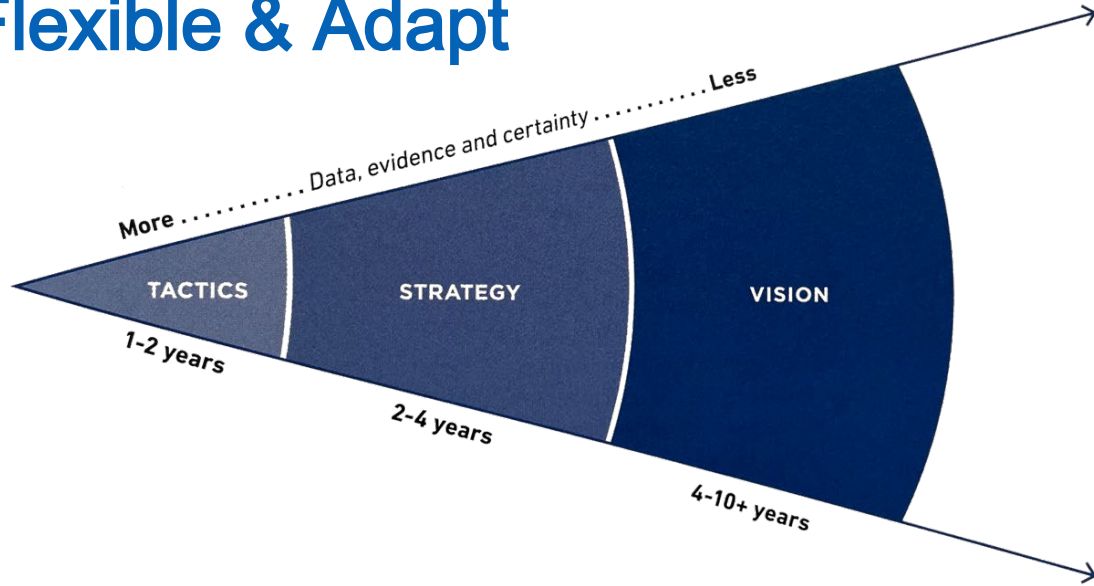
“Everybody has a plan until they get punched in

Mike Tyson



## KEY #3

# Stay Flexible & Adapt



## Time Cone

by Amy Webb, Futurist

**Tactics** are the actions you take to make progress against your strategic goals in the next 1 -2 years. Tactics are often directly connected to the budget and available resources.

**Strategy** defines the direction and priorities for how the organization will achieve its vision. What are your goals for the next 2-4 years that will get you closer to your vision?

**Vision** should be aspirational for the community; broad enough to be adaptable, but not so broad as to be meaningless. Where do you want to be in 4-10 years?

# Stay Flexible & Adapt

## Develop a Rolling Planning Process

- **Don't spend too much time on specifics of long term action items as this will most likely change over time.**
  - Conditions change (Covid, new legislation, etc.); new opportunities arise (new grants made available, for example)
  - You may even find that tactics are not working (kids not enrolling in summer programs, for example)
- **Revisit plan annually**
  - Could be in alignment with election cycle (e.g. mayor or board) or budget cycle.
  - Vision and Focus Areas should not change often; Goals shift; Action Items are refreshed every year.
  - Define problems should be one-time exercise, though strategies may adjust depending on outcomes.
  - 5 Year plan with versions for each Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, etc.

“Imagine a highway - you can change lanes, but you have to stay within the guardrails.”

- William Chroba, CFO  
Cleveland Metroparks

## KEY #4

# Your Plan Should Be “Alive”

- **Creating a plan is simply the first step! Don't just create the plan to “check the box.”**
- **Communicate status of the plan as it goes into action.**
  - Action items should updated with statuses and progress levels on a regular basis that are appropriate for the task.
  - Best if they are measurable, “completable,” and/or achievable.
  - Software greatly enhances ability to keep the plan up to date.
- **Use data to quickly communicate:**
  - How much progress?
  - Is that good or bad?
  - How much are we spending on this?
  - Are we on track with this spending plan?

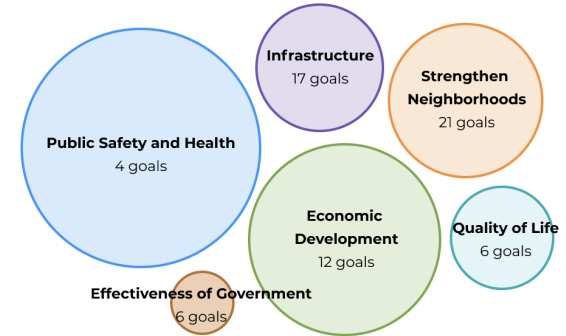


## KEY #5

# Connect the Dots to the Budget

- **Technology can now help you easily connect your strategic plan to your budget!**
  - Allocate budget line items to Focus Areas!
- **Plan -based budgets are easier to align to justifications**
  - “Postage Costs” vs. Mailing to support “Drive After School Program Attendance” goal.
- **Not all budget requests need to be tied to spending**
  - Much of government spending is simply operations and maintenance of public services.

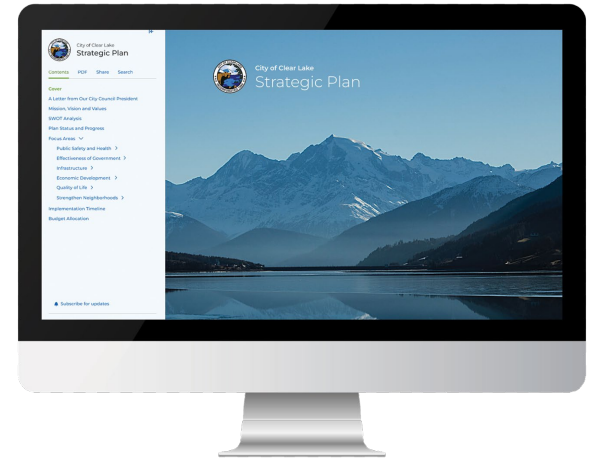
Dollar Allocation By Key Performance Area



Key Performance Area	Allocated
Public Safety and Health	\$3,736,000
Economic Development	\$3,504,000
Strengthen Neighborhoods	\$1,812,000
Infrastructure	\$1,620,000
Quality of Life	\$492,000
Effectiveness of Government	\$180,000

# Introducing ClearPlans

*A cloud -based software platform that allows public agencies to create, execute on and manage any type of action plan.*



# How does ClearPlans work?



## CREATE

Create Focus Areas, Goals & Action  
Items

## EXECUTE

Require colleagues to update  
Action Items at regular  
intervals

## MANAGE

Dashboarding allows insights into  
plan progress by Focus Area, by  
Department and more

## Create:

# Build Your Plan with a Flexible Framework

- 3 Levels of organization: Focus Areas, Goals and Actions Items
- Add tasks for more granularity on Action Items
- Rename any level
- Get up and running faster with crowd-sourced Focus Areas and Goals
- Collaborate with colleagues to flesh out Goals and Action Items with narratives and KPIs
- Set up plan allocations to your budget

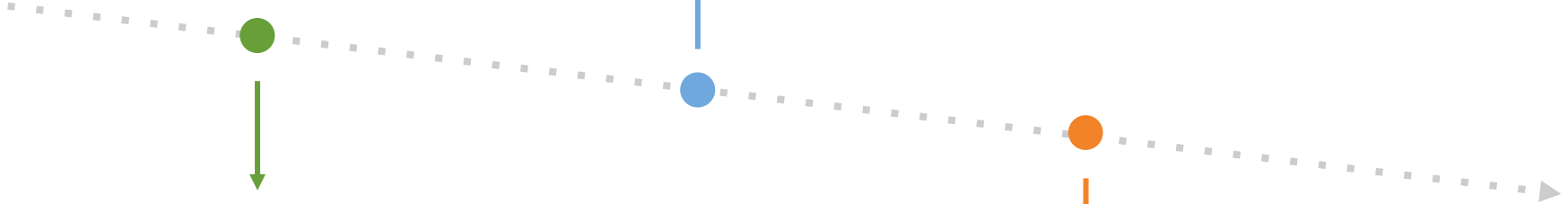


# Execute: Put Your Plan into Motion

Schedule ⓘ Monthly Last day of month

## Set Update Frequencies

Can be set to monthly, quarterly and annually  
Owners get email notifications to update their portion of the plan



Assigned To \* J. Williams x C. Smith x

## Assign Plan Participants

Every Goal and Action Item can be assigned multiple owners and departments

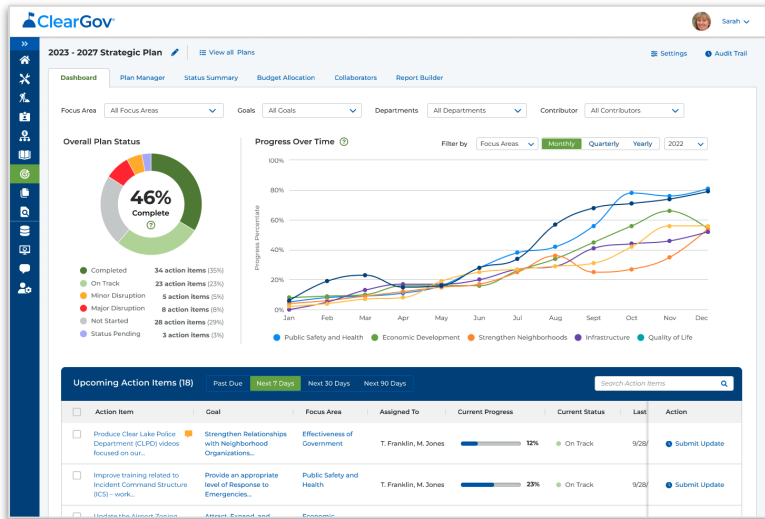
Update	Status	Progress	Notes	KPI Updated
10/20/2022	Select Status	<input type="range" value="26%"/> 26%	Enter notes here	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No

## Quickly Update the Plan

Make updates to progress, status, and KPIs at the Action Item level  
Add notes for context  
Include task updates for greater granularity

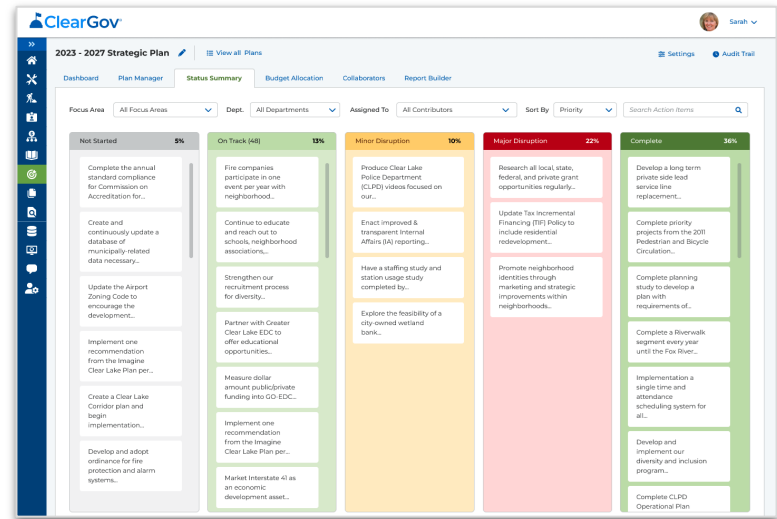


# Manage: Gather Insights from Powerful Reporting



## Flexible Dashboard

Track overall plan progress and action items - even filter by department and action items owner!



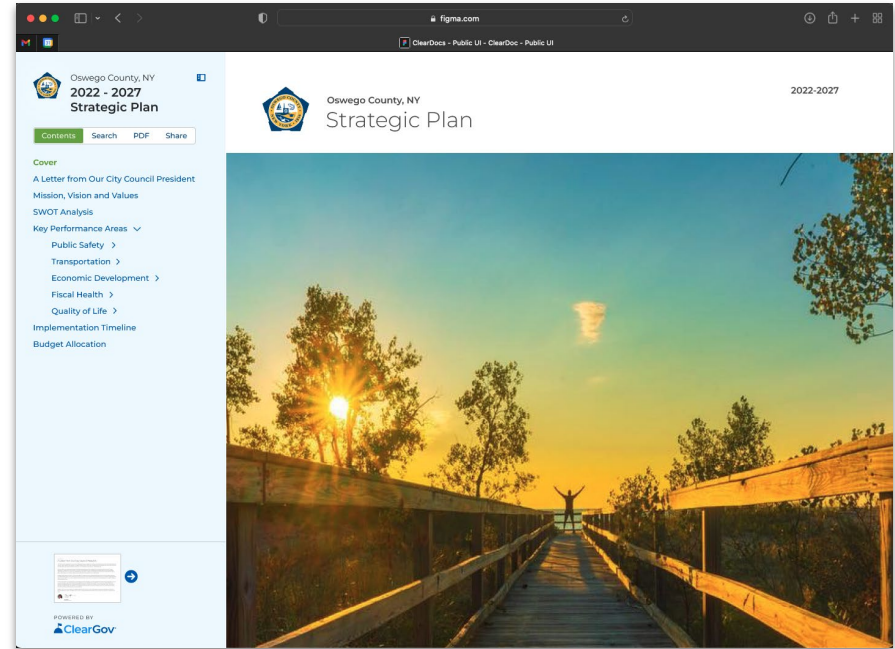
## Action Item Board

Quick see which tasks are on track and which task are falling behind.

# Ditch PDF Plans!

## Publish Your Plan with ClearDocs...

- Dynamically updated via status, progress updates and KPIs
- Interactive graphs allow users to drill in
- Integrated with your budget via Operational Budgeting
- Available as web-based dashboard
- Mobile-friendly
- Download to PDF download



**Let's take a look...**

Final Thought...

What's the most important  
thing about a strategic plan?

**That is gets done!**



# Thank You!



Scan for a  
personalized demo

[cleargov.com/lp/clearplans-beta](https://cleargov.com/lp/clearplans-beta)