

Wisconsin Downtown Action Council

Strategic Planning Process Executive Summary October 2006

The Wisconsin Downtown Action Council (WDAC) became interested in strategic planning, in early, 2005, in response to concern among WDAC Board members that the organization lacked focus and direction. Bill Rizzo of the Dane County UW-Extension Office was contacted during the early spring of 2005 about facilitating a strategic planning process for WDAC. After meeting with several WDAC Board members for an exploratory meeting, Dr. Rizzo agreed to facilitate the strategic planning process. Rizzo and met with the WDAC Board, in May of 2005, to design the planning process. The planning steps selected for use, in the order of use, include:

1. Stakeholder Analysis
2. Vision (abbreviated)
3. Mandate and Mission Development or Redevelopment
4. Environmental Scan
5. Strategic Issues Identification
6. Strategy Development
7. Implementation Planning

The planning process was designed to utilize planning sessions for discussion while the time between sessions was to be used for idea generation, through work assignments developed by the facilitator.

Date	Meeting Purpose
April 22, 2005	Initial Meeting with Tim Anderson
April 29, 2005	Discussion with WDAC Board
May 31, 2005	Plan Process Development Session
September 9, 2005	Strategic Planning Orientation/Education Session
October 21, 2005	Mandate and Mission Development Session
January 13, 2006	Mission Development Session
February 3, 2006	Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges Planning Session
March 10, 2006	Strategic Issues Planning Session
May 3, 2006	Strategic Planning Summit at WEDA Conference
June 19, 2006	Strategic Issues Selection Session
July 28, 2006	Planning Process Review Session

Stakeholder Analysis

the WDAC Stakeholder Analysis was conducted between May and October of 2005 through the use of individual interviews between WDAC Board Members and a wide variety of organizational stakeholders. This was a highly rigorous process intended to gather far better information of stakeholders and their views than would have been possible by less rigorous 'in-meeting' stakeholder analysis methods commonly used in strategic planning. While it did take considerable time and energy to complete, it also produced very useful information while providing an opportunity for WDAC Board Members to reconnect with many of their constituents personally,

The Stakeholder analysis was integrated into the process of rethinking and rewriting WDAC's mission. The new WDAC Mission Statement now reads as follows:

"WDAC is an information sharing and advocacy organization established to assist all Wisconsin communities in recognizing and supporting their downtowns as special places and strengthening their capacity to revitalize their downtowns into vibrant social and economic centers. We will pursue our mission through a mix of strategies including developing partnerships between other organizations to focus their resources on downtowns, acting as a clearing house for useful and current information about downtown issues and solutions, and facilitating opportunities for communities to work together for the betterment of all Wisconsin downtowns."

Environmental Scan

The analysis of external opportunities and threats and internal strengths and challenges generated the data listed below. This data would be used, along with other data generated during the planning process, to inform the development of strategic issues:

Internal Strengths

- Diversity of Board members – different areas of expertise
- ability to partner with other organizations
- strategic planning/plan itself/self-directed Board
- good will/good reputation developed over time
- access/leveraging experts
- open mindedness-respect6 different views
- committed Board and Board members
- Have a web site
- key partners in WI Main Street and UWEX
- strong structure and by-laws

Internal Challenges

- have not leveraged members or maximally involved them & experts – haven't exploited
- haven't recruited to Board as well as we can
- institutional memory not as strong as it could be
- not enough 'key' (influential) members
- no staff – HR constraints
- no operating plan
- weak structure
- not as widely represented across state
- lack of focused, achievable agenda – we try to do too much
- could be better at communication – in/outside
- support a 'shop downtown' attitude
- website management – follow through on expectations
- forget about smaller, unique downtowns
- ability to grow new members
- \$\$
- accountability
- can't access and leverage information fast enough
- haven't effectively communicated benefits to membership
- no guiding principles

External Opportunities

- in some places...
- more partnership opportunities (WEDA collaboration, BID conference)
- information technology (as a tool)
- increasing importance of “place”
- statewide growth as an organization
- regional approach to downtown organizing
- central city redevelopment
- retirees moving downtown, and others
- more BIDs and funding strategies are emerging
- need for what WDAC does
- historic preservation on the rise

External Challenges

- ‘competing’ downtown organizations
- growth of NPOs – fund raising
- big box development, lifestyle centers, e-retail
- lack of unique shops that really are unique
- changing roles of downtown – living wage (businesses)
- falling downtown revenues
- lack of downtown organizations/organization
- growth in convenience e shopping/pace
- dropping discretionary income
- challenges to small towns – economic
- neighborhoods re changing downtowns
- gentrification
- highways through and around (downtowns)
- lack of partnership/collaboration among downtown organizations

Strategic Issues

All data from the previous planning steps was discussed and used to generate a set of strategic issues, which represent the fundamental issues and challenges the WDAC Board believes the organization will face during the next several years, and for which strategies will be developed during the next step of the strategic planning process. these include:

1. What does WDAC need to do to distinguish itself across the state and within Wisconsin communities around its new Mission?
2. How should WDAC invest its resources so that members and non-members, despite having different needs and access to resources, receive support?
3. What does WDAC need to do to more fully cooperate/collaborate with organizations with similar missions throughout Wisconsin?

In June, the WDAC Board decided that a new Board of Directors should be installed prior to strategic planning going beyond the identification of strategic issues. At its March 2006 planning session, the WDAC Board decided that the strategic planning process with the current Board should not proceed past the identification of strategic issues, that a new Board of Directors should be identified during 2006, and that the new Board should have responsibility for developing and implementing strategies with which to address the strategic issues identified by the current board.

Presently, the WDAC Board of Directors is presently designing a Board recruitment and selection process. It is anticipated that the strategic planning steps of strategy formulation and implementation will occur with the new Board of Directors soon after they have been selected, in late 2006 or early 2007.