

# Strategic Planning Guidebook

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# Table of Contents

The Need for Strategic Planning .....	3
What are strategic plans? .....	3
What are the benefits? .....	3
How is a strategic plan different from an operational plan?.....	3
Creating the Strategic Plan .....	4
Step 1 – Define Agency Mission.....	4
Step 2 – Define Agency Vision .....	5
Step 3 – Conduct An Assessment.....	5
Step 4 – Review Enterprise Priorities.....	6
Step 5 – Develop Strategic Initiatives.....	6
Step 6 – Determine Performance Measures and Targets .....	6

# The Need for Strategic Planning

All agencies are required to develop a strategic plan, pursuant to the Accountable Government Act (Iowa Code §8E). Each agency must maintain one active strategic plan for their aligned organization.

The purpose of strategic planning is to drive continuous improvement of state government performance by:

- Thinking Long-Term: Promoting visionary, broad-perspective planning
- Delivering Results: Ensuring a focus on outcomes for Iowans
- Aligning Strategies: Facilitating the implementation of enterprise priorities

## What are strategic plans?

A strategic plan is an agency's multi-year roadmap for success. It connects the agency's mission and vision to reality by identifying the hurdles between the current state and future goals. By defining strategic initiatives and tracking year-over-year measures, the plan transforms high-level aspirations into accountable, transparent results.

## What are the benefits?

Strategic plans serve as a tool to:

- Establish a long-range view of priorities for the agency
- Drive continuous improvement and performance growth
- Guide resource allocation and human resource decisions, especially recruitment and hiring
- Evaluate agency progress
- Demonstrate transparency and accountability to Iowans
- Connect enterprise goals to individual employee work
- Inform training and orientation materials for new staff

## How is a strategic plan different from an operational plan?

The key distinctions between a strategic plan and an operational plan are based on the level of detail and the time span covered:

- Strategic Plan: A high-level roadmap focused on long-term initiatives spanning 3–5 years.
- Operational Plan: A detailed action plan focused on specific tasks and goals for a single fiscal year.

# Creating the Strategic Plan

Strategic planning includes the following:

- Collaborative Process: Successful planning requires the commitment of agency leadership and input from both employees and major stakeholders.
- Branding and Accessibility: Plans may be formatted to reflect your agency's branding. However, because final copies will be published on the Department of Management (DOM) [website](#), they must be written in plain language and formatted for digital accessibility so they are easy for all Iowans to read and navigate.
- Timeline: Plans must span at least three years and explicitly state the start and end dates of the coverage period (ex. FY2026–FY2030).

## Step 1 – Define Agency Mission

To get started, develop your agency's mission statement – a concise declaration of your agency's purpose that guides daily decision-making.

Questions to consider:

- What work do we do?
- Who do we serve?
- Why do we do this work?

The formula: We do (what) for (whom) because (why).

The goal: Create a clear, concise mission statement that can be supported by the whole agency.

*Example:* "The mission of the Department of Management is to maximize performance of enterprise agencies across Iowa via management of financial resources, technology, and information."

## Step 2 – Define Agency Vision

Once your mission is set, develop your vision statement - it describes the future state that you want to create for the community you serve.

Questions to consider as you develop your vision statement:

- What do we want to be known for doing?
- What will success look like for us five years from now?

The goal: An ideal vision statement is aspirational, easy to remember, and describes long-term success.

*Example:* “Be an effective, efficient, and approachable regulatory agency.” – Department of Inspections, Appeals, and Licensing (DIAL)

## Step 3 – Conduct An Assessment

Once the vision is set, conduct an assessment to capture the agency’s current state.

Most assessments use a SWOT analysis to identify:

- Strengths - Internal assets that support your vision
- Weaknesses - Internal areas needing improvement
- Opportunities - External factors you can leverage
- Threats - External challenges that may hinder progress

A complete assessment must include voices from both employees and customers. Common methods of capturing feedback include:

- Employee engagement surveys
- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Focus groups or stakeholder interviews

*Example:* An assessment might reveal high employee engagement (Strength) but significant customer dissatisfaction with call wait times (Weakness), signaling a need for process improvement.

## Step 4 – Review Enterprise Priorities

Identify which of the Governor’s annual enterprise priorities (presented during the Condition of the State address) your agency will support.

For 2026, the enterprise priorities are:

1. Delivering Property Tax Relief
2. Transforming Health Care in Iowa
3. Expanding Educational Freedom
4. Keeping Iowa’s Farms in the Family
5. Serving Iowans Who Served Us
6. Preserving Public Safety

Details for each of the enterprise priorities are available at <https://governor.iowa.gov/vision-iowa-0>.

## Step 5 – Develop Strategic Initiatives

You have defined where your agency is (Assessment) and where it wants to be (Vision). Now, you will develop 3-5 strategic initiatives to bridge that gap.

Strategic initiatives are broad, multi-year efforts designed to drive agency-wide change.

*Example:* After identifying slow license approvals in their assessment, DIAL created a strategic initiative to “deploy a uniform licensing technology solution” to reach their vision of efficiency.

## Step 6 – Determine Performance Measures and Targets

To track progress, you will need to develop at least one performance measure for each strategic initiative. Performance measures should focus on the outcomes to be achieved and serve to tell the public how your performance is changing.

Additionally, you will need to identify year-over-year numeric targets for each measure. The targets need to include the baseline (current state) as well as targets for each year covered by the strategic plan.

Targets should reflect continuous improvement (e.g., increasing positive outcomes or decreasing wait times). Actual performance will need to be measured and reported on after the fiscal year ends.

*Example:* To support their licensing initiative, DIAL tracks the average number of days to issue a license, setting annual targets to steadily reduce that timeframe.