20 QUESTIONS ON MUNICIPAL STRATEGY
COMPANION GUIDE

CONTENTS

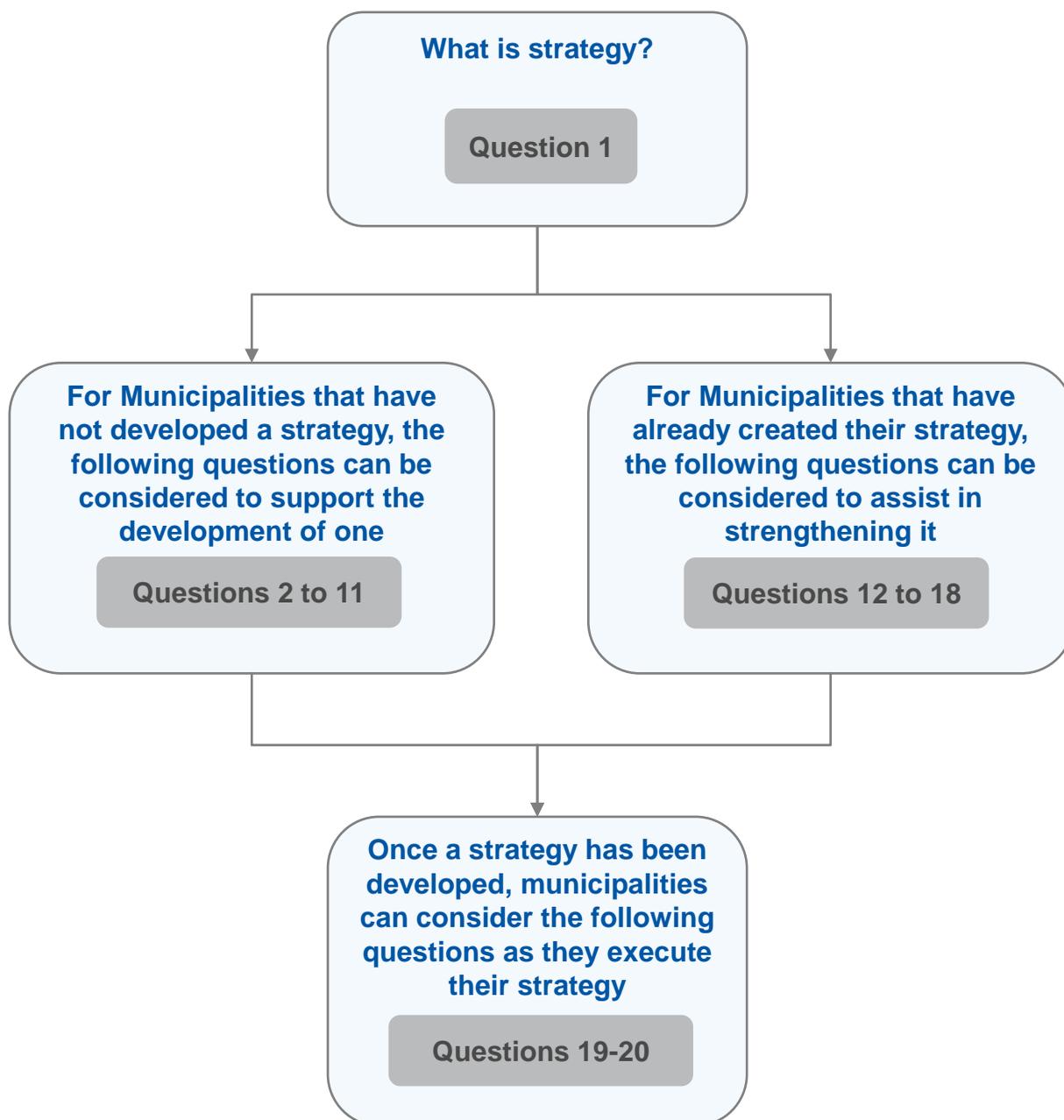# INTRODUCTION

GUIDE TO THE COMPANION DOCUMENT

The following diagram highlights which questions in this companion document a municipality may wish to consider.

What is strategy?

Question 1

For Municipalities that have not developed a strategy, the following questions can be considered to support the development of one

Questions 2 to 11

For Municipalities that have already created their strategy, the following questions can be considered to assist in strengthening it

Questions 12 to 18

Once a strategy has been developed, municipalities can consider the following questions as they execute their strategy

Questions 19-20

1. WHAT IS A MUNICIPAL STRATEGY?

Developing a municipal strategy allows a community to take advantage of opportunities, address challenges and mitigate risks. A strategy allows a Council and Administration to work collaboratively to achieve a vision for their municipality in a focused way. A strategy considers the long term, and how to focus limited resources on key goals, in a way that makes a municipality more responsive and performance driven. Municipalities that operate with no defined strategies run the risk of becoming occupied by only what is necessary to 'keep the lights on' each day. This means that long term opportunities and challenges may not be addressed – which could impact the viability of a community.

WHAT IS A MUNICIPAL STRATEGY?

- A municipal strategy is a plan that outlines the important priorities and outcomes of a community over time. It should be inclusive of all aspects of a municipality (e.g. social, infrastructure, etc.).

- While municipalities may have multiple strategies, this document refers to a single overarching municipal strategy that should be developed.

- A strategy should show how a municipality will get to where they want to be (i.e. their vision) and where it will focus its resources.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- A strategy should be concise and easy to read.

- The right people need to be involved in developing a strategy– participants should be knowledgeable and influential, allowing for informed, honest conversations about key issues.

- A clear understanding of the current state of a municipality is necessary to develop a good strategy. This provides insight into what important barriers and issues are faced by a community, in addition to any opportunities that currently exist.

- A strategy should not be focused on the day to day activities of the municipality. Instead, it should focus on the big picture that will help it to address its opportunities and challenges.

- The timeline for a municipal strategy should be flexible, but should be focused on long term success. Most municipalities develop their strategic plans for the next 3 to 5 years, though some may consider longer or shorter term strategies for particular topics. It should be refreshed on a regular basis.

LEADING PRACTICE

Identify descriptive words to help guide the strategy for a municipality

When the City of Timisoara in Romania was drafting its strategic plan, they asked residents what descriptive words came to mind when thinking of their City. The most common terms identified were: "business gateway, high-tech science hub, multicultural, and tourist attraction". These descriptive words were used as a guide by the municipal team that drafted the strategic plan, and allowed residents to see themselves in the final strategy for their City.

- Romania

CREATING A NEW STRATEGY

2. WHAT ARE THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS TO BE AWARE OF WHEN DEVELOPING A STRATEGY?

Looking at the factors that impact a municipality allows Council and Administration to identify opportunities and challenges. This process allows municipalities to plan for a sustainable future for their residents.

FACTORS IMPACTING MUNICIPALITIES

- Determining the factors that impact a municipality is an important first step in developing a meaningful municipal strategy. It provides a foundation for the things that a municipality should consider.

- There are various tools available to structure the process of gathering and analyzing internal and factors – however the most common are SWOC and PESTLE.

SWOC ANALYSIS TOOL

A SWOC analysis gives a municipality insight into the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **C**hallenges it may face. Some examples are pictured below:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Challenges
✓ Waste management staff and processes are efficient	✓ Water services are expensive and unsustainable	✓ Resource development opportunities	✓ Environmental impact of resource development

When undertaking a SWOC analysis, keep the following in mind for each category:

- **Strengths:** These are factors internal to your municipality that are positive – things that you are 'known for'. When thinking about your strengths consider: What do we do well? What aspects of our municipality receive consistent praise from our residents?

- **Weaknesses:** These are factors internal to your municipality that are not favorable – things that you could 'do better' at. When thinking about your weaknesses consider: What do our residents consistently ask us to improve? What do we know we could be better at?

- **Opportunities:** These are factors that we could benefit if we took advantage of them. They may be things that are internal to how we operate or external forces / changes that may affect us. Finding these opportunities requires some thought about emerging trends and external forces such as: What economic opportunities will become available to us? What technological advances could we utilize? What partnership opportunities exist with other municipalities or with business and industry?

- **Challenges:** These are factors internal or external to a municipality that may harm it or stall progress. When thinking about challenges to a municipality the following questions can be useful: What issues is the region in which we operate facing? What are surrounding municipalities struggling with? What broad trends are negatively impacting municipalities?

PESTLE ANALYSIS TOOL

A PESTLE analysis gives a municipality insight into the external factors that could impact or influence a municipality as follows:

- **Political:** What are the Federal and Provincial government influences will affect us?

- **Economic:** What economic factor could impact our municipality?

- **Social:** What cultural and demographic trends could impact our municipality?

- **Technological:** What innovations in technology could impact our municipality?

- **Legislative:** What changes to existing or new laws, regulations or policies will impact us?

- **Environmental:** What environmental considerations and impacts could affect us?

The results of a PESTLE analysis can be useful in determining the opportunities and challenges of a municipality as outlined in a SWOC analysis.

LEADING PRACTICE

Environmental scan to identify trends

The Town of Aurora uses an environmental scan for their strategic planning process which includes relevant background information such as demographic data, socio-economic data, and the available resource base. This background data is used to identify key trends. The scan's feedback is then used to draft the Strategic Plan framework which includes vision and goals.   - Ontario

3. WHAT DO WE ENVISION OUR MUNICIPALITY TO BE?

A shared vision for a municipality establishes a long term outcome that can be achieved for residents and the community at large. A vision paints a picture of the ideal future for a municipality and lays the foundation for strategies to achieve this. Establishing, agreeing, and adhering to a shared vison is also a key way to enable effective municipal governance.

WHAT IS A MUNICIPAL VISION?

- A municipal vision defines what an ideal future looks like for a municipality – but is still realistic and achievable.
- The vision illustrates what a municipality wants to achieve over time and can be measured.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- A vision should be concise and written in plain language– the most impactful statements are either one sentence or a simple phrase that the majority of residents can understand.
- A vision statement should inspire visual depictions of the municipality's future state – in some instances pictures are a good tool to illustrate a municipality's vision.
- A vision should be stated broadly to address the diverse needs of a municipality.
- A vision statement should inspire the community to take action.
- A vision should be focused on the long term – most municipal visions span between 5 and 30 years.
- Typically, the following questions can be used to develop a municipality's vision:
  - What changes would we like to see in our municipality?
  - What are the municipality's strengths and assets?
  - What challenges does the municipality face?
  - What opportunities exist for the municipality?
  - What does success look like?

LEADING PRACTICE

Paint the future

The City of Nis in Serbia asked schools to paint the future of their City in addition to sending questionnaires to residents asking "what is Nis when it is at its best?". Results were used to develop a vision for the City.

- Serbia

VISION EXAMPLES

A strong, diverse and sustainable Peace River Region inspired by innovative leadership that promotes livable and safe communities and a healthy natural environment   - Town of Peace River

Respectful of our past; creating our future Hinton is a community of opportunity – an active, culturally rich, safe environment in which to grow

- Town of Hinton

4. WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE?

A mission statement is a concise summary of the purpose of a municipality. It includes the aims and values of a municipality, that shows why it exists and how it will work towards achieving its vision. Although publically stated, a mission statement is an internal tool designed to keep Council and Administration focused on working towards a common purpose. A municipality's mission statement guides it to ultimately realize its vision.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

■ Mission statements are clear and succinct, written in one or two sentences.

■ The purpose of a municipality should demonstrate an understanding of the priorities of its residents and how it intends to serve them in the best manner possible.

■ Mission statements need to describe what the municipality will do and why it will do it.

■ Mission statements should be outcome oriented – focused on achieving a goal, specifically the vision for the municipality.

■ A mission statement should answer the following questions:
  – What does the municipality do?
  – Who does the municipality do it for?
  – How does the municipality do it?
  – What benefit does this provide?

LEADING PRACTICE

Focus a mission statement on what your municipality aims to provide

The City of Toronto worked to develop a mission statement that provided clarity on its purpose and how it aims to provide its services. This is used to guide its governance practices and helped to streamline its objectives.

- Ontario

Identify key stakeholders

The mission statement for the Municipality of Wawa in the USA outlines the key stakeholders in the community that are important or impacted by the municipality.

- USA

MISSION EXAMPLES

Our mission is to provide residents, visitors and the business community with the highest quality municipal services in an efficient and courteous manner, in order to foster a family-friendly community.

- Town Fort Macleod

Hinton Town Council serves the interests of citizens to enable our community to reach its full potential.

- Town of Hinton

To work together to enhance the spirit, traditions and diversity of the Peace River Region and to support a high quality of life for its residents.

- Town of Peace River

We will provide our community accessible government and quality services in a responsible manner within a healthy environment.

- Town of Ponoka

TOOL

The following template can be used to assist in the development of a municipal mission statement:

_____(the municipality) exists to _____(verb) _____(noun) for _____(who) so that _____(benefit)

5. WHAT ARE OUR KEY VALUES TO GUIDE WHAT WE BELIEVE IN AND HOW WE BEHAVE?

Municipality's should define, promote and demonstrate their core values through how they behave. Values should be seen and visible in practice. This means that Council and Administration uphold high standards of conduct in all their interactions and behaviours based on these shared values.

WHAT ARE MUNICIPAL VALUES?

■ Values should be focused on the things that a municipality believes in (e.g. economic, environmental, infrastructure, cultural priorities, etc.) or how it expects its Council and Administration to behave (e.g. ethical, social practices, etc.).

■ Municipal values indicate the principles that will be used to guide the behaviours of a municipality when it implements its strategy. For example, if a municipality has identified environmental sustainability as a value, the strategy should be implemented in a way that is conscious of how the environment is impacted – e.g. limit the number of paper copies of the strategy produced.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

■ Municipal values are defined and promoted through practice. This means that the values of a municipality are only meaningful to the community if they see them being used regularly.

■ Values should be agreed to by both Council and Administration to ensure there is buy in for the agreed upon behaviours.

LEADING PRACTICE

The Municipal Research and Services Center (USA) has developed guidelines for municipalities to develop values as follows:

■ *Values should be universally shared:* Values are shared by governors and staff, strongly held, and not easily changed.

■ *Values should be defined in a structured manor:* Either a planning retreat or at a special meeting; the process will usually take several hours, and should include board and at least senior staff. The values should be prescribed with the mission and vision statements at the planning event.

http://www.recycledelnorte.ca.gov/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/140821-dnswma-special-full.pdf

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VALUES EXAMPLES

Integrity: We walk our talk. We are honest and open in our communications, our relationships and our actions, and are guided by strong moral principles. We are trustworthy, loyal, and respectful to the community we work for and with. – Town of Fort Macleod

Dedication: We willingly take on responsibility. We are committed to serving our community. We take initiative and we take on our share of the work.- Town of Oakville

Excellence: Excellence in the design and delivery of municipal policy, programs and services is critical to a positive, and engaged relationship with our stakeholders. – Municipality of East Hants

Accountability: Taking ownership and accepting responsibility for making decisions and following up with implementation of those decisions. – Town of Peace River

Social Wellness: A safe community that welcomes diversity and supports all citizens with high quality and accessible cultural, recreational and public services. –City of Medicine Hat

Fiscal Planning/Financial Stability: Long term financial planning is paramount to ensure the financial sustainability of the County for decades into the future. – Town of Stettler

Sustainability: A way of living that meets the needs of the present and does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. – City of Edmonton

Collaboration: Be progressive or sustainable without collaborating with regional communities, other levels of government and the private sector. – Town of Stettler

Informed: We make informed decisions based on reliable information. – City of Grande Prairie

Dialogue: Engaging our community and enhancing our relationships. – City of Red Deer

Leadership: making sound decisions today and demonstrating vision while focusing on the future. – Town of Peace River

Healthy and Safe Work Environment: We enhance the quality of life by minimizing risk and creating an environment where people are valued as individuals. – Town of Cochrane

Flexible: We are adaptable. We seize opportunities to grow in new directions, and approach change with creative solutions to overcome challenges. – Town of Fort Macleod

Innovation: We are a creative leading-edge organization embracing new ideas and new technologies. – Town of Cochrane

6. WHAT ARE OUR KEY AREAS?

A municipality should focus on several key areas as part of its strategy to achieve its mission and vision. These areas should be representative of the activities of the municipality so that goals and objectives can be set for each.

FOCUSING ON KEY BUSINESS AREAS

- Municipalities should determine which key areas of their business they will strategize around in order to achieve their mission and vision. These are key areas that long term strategies are appropriate for.

- Consideration to the results of the SWOC and PESTLE analysis that were previously completed should form a part of this. Key areas should reflect where a municipality will want to capitalize on strengths or opportunities or respond to weaknesses or challenges.

- Identifying and focusing on specific business areas allows municipalities to target their limited resources. It also helps to provide focus to the strategy.

- Key business areas should be named specifically – vague references to general areas will not be as meaningful. Examples are provided on the following page.

ALBERTA MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT ACT GUIDELINES

- In sections 631 and 632, the *Municipal Government Act* outlines some key areas that a municipality should focus on when planning. These areas offer some guidance to the key areas that a strategy should be developed for. Some of these areas include:
  - Land use, development and planning
  - Physical, social or economic development
  - Relations with other municipalities – including conflict resolution if necessary
  - Transportation infrastructure and planning
  - Municipal services (i.e. waste, water, sewage, etc.)
  - General municipal infrastructure and facilities
  - Financial resources
  - Municipal, school and environmental reserve allocation and use

LEADING PRACTICE

Identify clear areas of focus for strategy

The City of Edmonton's Strategic Plan *The Way Ahead* identifies 6 distinct areas of focus. The plan states that they will provide a clear focus for the future and direct long-term planning for the City of Edmonton. The areas identified in Edmonton's plan include:

1. Transform Edmonton's urban form
2. Enhance use of public transit and active modes of transportation
3. Improve Edmonton's Livability
4. Preserve and Sustain Edmonton's Environment
5. Ensure Edmonton's Financial Stability
6. Diversify Edmonton's Economy

- Alberta

KEY AREA EXAMPLES

Residential Development: Promote residential development. – City of Grande Prairie

Water: Ensure clean water is available for citizens at all times and manage water use through water metering at each municipal residence. – Town of Hinton

Engineering and Development: Ensure the community has modern and reliable infrastructure, through continuous upgrading, and new development to meet the community's needs. – Town of Ponoka

Economic Diversification: Increase the diversity of, and the number of businesses in the community. – Town of Ponoka

Waste Reduction: Through recycling and recovery waste at landfills will be reduced. – Town of Hinton

Policing: Lead a region wide strategy to address insufficient police resources. – Town of Peace River

Physical Infrastructure: Continuously upgrade and maintain municipal infrastructure. – Town of Fort Macleod

7. WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIES THAT WE WANT TO UNDERTAKE FOR EACH OF OUR KEY AREAS?

Once key areas have been selected for a municipality, supporting strategies that represent what the municipality will do in order to work towards achieving its mission and vision need to be developed. These strategies should consider the internal and external forces, the values of the municipality, and ultimately be specific, measureable, achievable, relevant and time-based.

WHAT ARE STRATEGIC GOALS?

- Strategic goals provide focus for a municipality as it works to achieve its vision and mission.
- These goals will show what a municipality will accomplish as it carries out its overarching municipal strategy in a key area.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Each defined strategy should be reviewed to ensure that it follows the SMART methodology (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based).
- Goals and objectives should directly align with the mission, vision, and values identified by the municipality.

PRIORITIZATION

- As the municipal strategy is developed, many good ideas and initiatives will come forward.
- It is likely that not all municipalities will have the resources needed to implement all of the initiatives and ideas that are identified. As such, it will be necessary to prioritize the most impactful initiatives.
- Using the matrix (pictured at right), municipalities can assess which initiatives will be desirable or realistic to implement.
- For example, initiative #5 could be highly desirable as it has a high impact with low resources needed to implement. Conversely, initiative #2 may not be desirable to implement as it has a low impact and requires a high level of resources to implement.
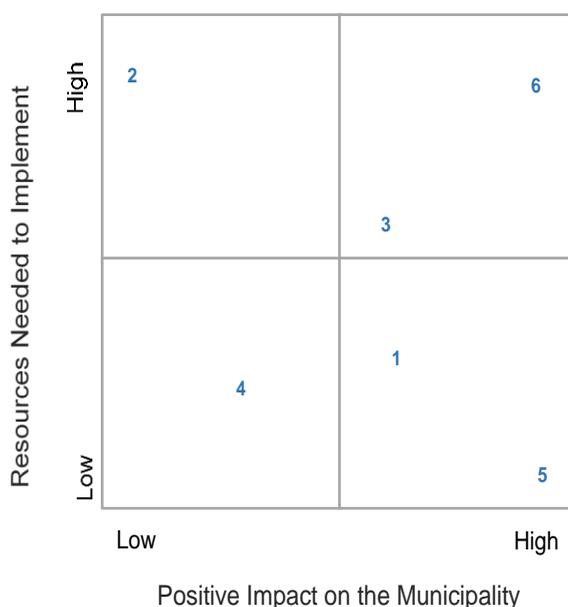
LEADING PRACTICE

Prioritize and sequence projects

VNG International, a worldwide cooperation of municipalities, advises its members that it is more than likely that the demand for projects defined via the strategy process will exceed the available financial resources. This makes it necessary to prioritize projects to address what has been identified as the most important.

8. WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGIES MAKING UP THE OVERALL MUNICIPAL STRATEGY?

Strong linkages should exist between a municipality's overall corporate strategy and its individual short and long term departmental strategies. A corporate strategy provides the overarching direction for a municipality. This provides the starting point for each of a municipality's departments to develop supporting short and long-term strategies that help to achieve what is envisioned.

DEVELOPING DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGY

- Each municipal business unit or department should have a strategy with accompanying goals and measures.

- Departmental strategies are focused on adding additional detail to the municipality's corporate strategy. They should align and complement what is envisioned rather than move in a different direction. A departmental strategy can either be short-term, such as a business plan, or long-term, such as a 3-5 year strategic plan.

- If departmental strategies are missing, they should be developed as part of the larger strategy development process.

LINKING DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGY

- The strategy of each department should be linked to the overarching municipal strategy.

- For example, if the vision for a municipality is to "grow while respecting the environment", applicable municipal departments should focus their strategies around growth and environmental conservation.

- As a test, after a departmental strategy has been developed, review it against the vision, mission and values of the municipality to asses its alignment.

LEADING PRACTICE

Relate departmental strategy to municipal strategy

The City of Calgary develops separate departmental plans for areas such as utilities and environmental protection, transportation, parking, and partnerships. Each of these departmental plans are linked to *Calgary's Action Plan 2015-2018* by stating how they will contribute to the outcomes identified. For example, the transportation departmental plan states that "transportation facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods which contributes to creating a great place to work and live". This recognizes that providing excellent transportation will contribute to the objective of being "a city that moves" outlined in the municipal strategy.

- Alberta

9. WHAT RESOURCES ARE NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE OUR STRATEGIES?

When the strategy has been developed and priorities have been decided, resources can be allocated to each to ensure that Council understands what it will take to achieve its vision.

BUDGETING AND STRATEGY

- A long term fiscal plan (i.e. budget) should accompany a municipality's strategy.
- The budget should outlines how limited financial resources will be used to accomplish the identified strategies. This should be considered in addition to the budget necessary to deliver core services offered by a municipality.

RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

- Using the results of the prioritization previously described, municipalities can develop their budget to accommodate the strategic initiatives and priorities that have been agreed upon.
- The process of resource distribution should also include a discussion on human resources and capabilities. For example when an initiative is discussed, a municipality should determine whether they have the expertise to implement it internally or if they require external resources.
- The distribution of resources in the budget should be directly linked to the vision, mission and values outlined in the strategic plan.

LEADING PRACTICE

The Government Finance Officer Association (GFOA) has developed *The 12 Elements of the Budget Process* to aid municipalities as they develop budgets:

Establish Broad Goals to Guide Government Decision Making

1. Assess community needs, priorities, challenges and opportunities
2. Identify opportunities and challenges for government services, capital assets, and management
3. Develop and disseminate broad goals

Develop Approaches to Achieve Goals

4. Adopt financial policies
5. Develop programmatic, operating, and capital policies and plans
6. Develop programs and services that are consistent with policies and plans
7. Develop management strategies

Develop a Budget Consistent with Approaches to Achieve Goals

8. Develop a process for preparing and adopting a budget
9. Develop and evaluate financial options
10. Make choices necessary to adopt a budget

Evaluate Performance and Make Adjustments

11. Monitor, measure, and evaluate performance
12. Make adjustments as needed

http://www.gfoa.org/sites/default/files/RecommendedBudgetPractices.pdf

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10. WHAT RISKS MAY AFFECT US ACHIEVING OUR STRATEGY?

A well defined strategy for a municipality considers the risks that may affect its achievement. Risks may be factors that a municipality may or may not control, but can manage and / or monitor through a defined process.

WHAT IS A RISK?

- A risk is a situation or circumstance that exposes a municipality to loss or damage.

- For example, a risk to municipalities in Alberta is a winter or series of winters with larger than usual accumulations of snow, which requires additional financial resources to address.

WHY IDENTIFY RISKS?

- Identifying risks before they become problems allows municipalities to plan their operations to avoid threats.

- Ranking and comparing risks allows municipalities to develop strategies to mitigate those with the greatest impact.

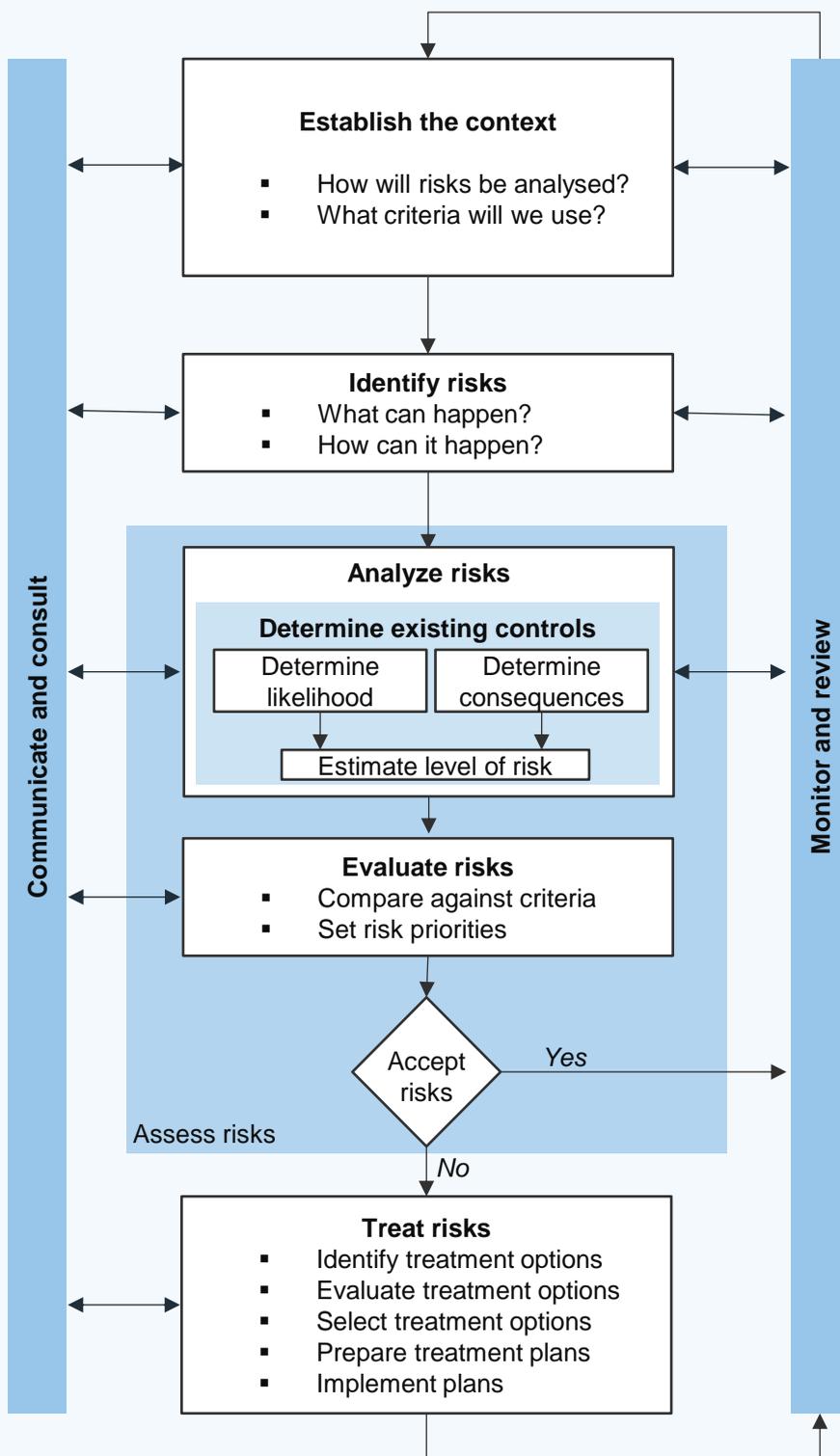## IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING RISK

Australia and New Zealand developed a joint model (pictured on next page) to identify and manage municipal risk known as the Standard Risk Model. This model has been identified as a global leader in municipal risk management and identification. The model outlines the process with the following steps:

- **Establish the context:** Set the stage for how risks will be evaluated and analysed.

- **Identify risks:** Identify what, why and how things may arise as risk.

- **Analyze risks:** Determine what controls are currently in place for the identified risks. Consider the range of consequences for each risk and how likely those consequences are to occur.

- **Evaluate risks:** Rank risks to identify priority areas.

- **Treat risks:** Accept and monitor low-priority risks. For other risks, develop and implement a plan which includes consideration of funding.

- **Monitor and Review:** Monitor and review the performance of risk management and changes which might affect it.

- **Communicate and Consult:** Communicate and consult with internal and external stakeholders as appropriate at each stage of the risk management process and concerning the process as a whole

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AUMA Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) Toolkit

The AUMA has developed an ERM toolkit for municipalities that can be accessed through the following link: <insert hyperlink here>

STANDARD RISK MODEL EXAMPLE

Communicate and consult

Monitor and review

Establish the context
- How will risks be analysed?
- What criteria will we use?

Identify risks
- What can happen?
- How can it happen?

Analyze risks

Determine existing controls

| Determine likelihood | Determine consequences |

Estimate level of risk

Evaluate risks
- Compare against criteria
- Set risk priorities

Accept risks — *Yes*

No

Assess risks

Treat risks
- Identify treatment options
- Evaluate treatment options
- Select treatment options
- Prepare treatment plans
- Implement plans

11. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATION IN DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY?

It is important to clearly define the roles of Council and Administration prior to the development of municipal strategy. Without clear role definition, tensions can rise between the two groups which can impact important decisions.

DISTINCT ROLES

- Council and Administration should start with the shared understanding that each group has a separate and distinct role in developing strategy.
- The roles of council and administration for each of the preceding questions are outlined in the following table:

Strategy Element	Role of Administration	Role of Council	Refer to Question
Internal and External Factors (i.e. SWOC and PESTLE)	■ Identify internal and external factors that impact the municipality	■ Review and approve internal and external factors	2
Vision	■ Develop a draft vision that reflects the desired future state	■ Review and approve the vision statement	3
Mission	■ Develop a draft mission statement that reflects a the purpose of a municipality	■ Review the and approve the mission statement	4
Values	■ Develop draft values that show what a municipality believes in	■ Review and approve draft values	5
Key Focus Areas	■ Develop a list focus areas of business with reasons for each	■ Review draft list of focus areas and finalize	6
Strategies	■ Prioritize areas of focus to develop a draft list of strategies	■ Review and finalize draft strategies	7
Departmental Strategies	■ Determine appropriate departmental strategies present draft to Council	■ Review departmental strategies and finalize	8
Resources	■ Develop a draft budget aligned with the municipal strategy	■ Approve and finalize the municipal budget	9
Risks	■ Develop a comprehensive list of risks and mitigation actions	■ Review and finalize risks and mitigation	10

LEADING PRACTICE

Council reviews the strategic plan regularly

The Town of Stettler's Council performs an annual review, assessment and evaluation of their municipal strategy. This ensures strategic focus and helps them achieve their long term vision.

- Alberta

Council reviews and endorses the strategic plan

The City of Nanaimo's Council reviews the draft strategic plan to ensure the strategic direction is in line with the best interests of their constituents. Council focuses their review on ensuring Economic Health, Environmental Responsibility, Social Equity, and Cultural Vitality.

- BC

EVALUATING AN EXISTING STRATEGY

12. DOES OUR MUNICIPALITY HAVE THE RIGHT STRATEGY?

Some municipalities may already have strategies that they have developed through their own processes. To help strengthen these, the following provides some key questions to consider in your effort to validate or refresh your strategy.

REVIEW OF MUNICIPAL STRATEGY

- The municipal strategy should be reviewed regularly to ensure it is up to date.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

To assess whether your municipality has the right strategy, consider the following questions:

- ✓ Which of the strategies have we achieved?

- ✓ For those that we haven't achieved, why didn't we?

- ✓ Do our municipal strategies clearly state where we will focus our time, effort and resources?

- ✓ Are these focus areas appropriate considering our current operations and environment?

LEADING PRACTICE

VNG International, a worldwide cooperation of municipalities, advises its members to:

- ✓ **Assess feasibility**: If the strategies are overambitious, with no realistic means of financing, they are probably unfeasible. It is better to have fewer plans that are possible to implement, rather than ambitious plans that cannot reasonably be achieved.

- ✓ **Monitor and Evaluate:** Is there evidence of the strategies being implemented? What evidence (i.e. measurement of progress) is there to show whether the strategies have been successful? Are there regular reports that monitor the progress of municipalities?

13. WHAT PROCESS DID WE FOLLOW TO DEVELOP OUR STRATEGY?

Having a set process for municipal planning and strategy development provides needed structure to municipal Councils and Administrations.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

■ A defined process to develop a municipal strategy provides a proven path to success for those that have not done it before.

■ When no process is used, the strategic planning process lacks focus and can become confusing and / or redundant.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

■ Involving residents in the strategic planning process is a critical step to obtaining shared buy in to the strategy. There are many ways to do this, from social media campaigns, to open houses, to invitations to engagement sessions.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

To assess whether your municipality has the right process for municipal strategy, consider the following questions:

✓ Is there a defined process for the development of municipal strategies in our municipality?

✓ Are our strategies concise and easy to read?

✓ Did our process involve the community? Other stakeholders?

✓ Can we track our progress toward achieving our vision for the municipality?

LEADING PRACTICE

The Municipal Research and Services Center (USA) has developed a **7 Step Process for Municipal Planning** as follows:

1) ***Secure a consensus regarding the need for a strategic plan:*** Council and Administration determine the need for a strategic plan. If no strategic plan is in place, developing a strategic plan is a good idea. If a strategic plan exists, the groups should determine if it is up to date and reflects the current and desired future states.

2) ***Select and retain a facilitator:*** A designated facilitator for strategic conversations will help ensure conversations are structured and productive. Ideally, facilitators will be knowledgeable in strategic development and will not be biased.

3) ***Assess the current condition of the municipality:*** Strategic discussions begin by developing an understanding of the current state.

4) ***Determine the duration of the strategic plan:*** Strategic plans often span a designated period of time. For example, a plan could span from 2015-2020. The group will decide what period of time is most appropriate for their municipality.

5) ***Determine the process that will be followed to develop the strategic plan:*** A process to develop the remainder of the strategic plan, including how the community will be involved, is developed.

6) ***Determine how frequently the plan will be reviewed and updated:*** To ensure the plan stays up to date, the frequency of review is decided. For example, a municipality may review their plan each quarter, semi-annually or annually as appropriate.

7) ***Implement the plan:*** The plan is implemented.

14. DO WE HAVE THE RIGHT VISION?

The vision of a municipality illustrates an ideal future state for residents, Council, and Administration. It is important that, as much as possible, this vision is shared amongst all members of the community.

REVIEW THE VISION

- The vision of a municipality should be reviewed regularly to ensure it is a good fit for the municipality.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

To assess whether your municipality has the right vision, consider the following questions:

- ✓ Does our municipal vision accurately state what success looks like for our community?
- ✓ Is this vision appropriate considering our current state?
- ✓ Does our vision reflect the desires of all members of the community?
- ✓ Are performance measures aligned to our municipal vision?

LEADING PRACTICE

The vision is reflected in major municipal planning processes

Tasmania produced their vision *Tasmania Together* that reflects their ideal future state based on the results of a broad community consultation process. This vision is included and linked to many of the important planning processes or government departments. This shows buy-in to the vision and a shared sense of ownership for the vision.

- Australia

VNG International, a worldwide cooperation of municipalities, advises its members to **ensure the vision is realistic**. If the municipal vision is too generic and unrealistic it will have little impact on action in the community.

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15. DO WE HAVE THE RIGHT MISSION?

The mission describes the purpose of a municipality. The mission should be focused on achieving the vision of the municipality.

REVIEW THE VISION

■ The vision of a municipality should be reviewed regularly to ensure it is a good fit for the municipality.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

To assess whether your municipality has the right mission, consider the following questions:

✓ Does our mission accurately state what the purpose of our municipality is?

✓ Is this mission appropriate considering our current state?

✓ Is our mission statement clear and succinct?

✓ Does our mission statement answer:

  – What does the municipality do?
  – Who does the municipality do it for?
  – How does the municipality do it?
  – What benefit does this provide?

LEADING PRACTICE

Adjust the mission statement as needed

In New York City, things change at a fast pace. For this reason they understand the importance of reviewing their mission statement regularly. In most cases, minor changes or clarification is needed to ensure that the mission meets the needs of those in the City, but the original intent of the mission remains true to its original design.

- USA

16. DO WE HAVE THE RIGHT VALUES?

The values of a municipality define, promote and demonstrate the things that are important to a municipality. The values of a municipality come alive as they come into action.

REVIEW THE VALUES

- The values of a municipality should be reviewed regularly to ensure they align with the strategic plan.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

To assess whether your municipality has the right values, consider the following questions:

- ✓ Do our values align well to our strategic plan?
- ✓ Are our values evident through the actions of Councillors, Administrators and residents?
- ✓ Do our values align with our vision and mission?
- ✓ Are our values appropriate considering our current state?

LEADING PRACTICE

Values guide strategy

Auckland supports a set of values to guide decision making regarding the future of their City. Working by these values ensures that decisions made contribute to Auckland's drive towards its vision.

- New Zealand

17. HAVE WE STRATEGIZED AROUND THE RIGHT KEY AREAS?

Key business areas of focus are identified to help a municipality achieve its vision and mission.

REVIEW THE KEY AREAS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

■ The values of a municipality should be reviewed regularly to ensure they align with the strategic plan.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

To assess whether your municipality has identified the right key areas, consider the following questions:

✓ Are we seeing progress in our identified areas of focus? Why or why not?

✓ Are the areas of focus allowing us to fulfill our municipal mission and realize our vision?

✓ What changes need to be made to the areas of focus identified to reflect our current circumstances and to better align them to the strategic plan?

✓ Are the results of our most recent scan of internal and external factors reflected in our key areas of focus?

LEADING PRACTICE

VNG International, a worldwide cooperation of municipalities, advises its members to:

▪ **Ensure focus areas are prioritized:** Often municipalities have so many development needs that it can be difficult for them to decide what to tackle first. If there is no clear prioritization, it is likely that nothing gets done at all. Having clear priorities for the implementation of initiatives in key business areas shows commitment to the strategic plan.

18. ARE OUR STRATEGIES WELL STATED AND ALIGNED WITH OUR MISSION AND VISION?

The strategies of a municipality should be directly aligned to the mission and vision agreed to.

REVIEW THE STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVES

■ The objectives of a municipal strategy should show what will be accomplished during implementation.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

To assess whether your municipality's strategies are well stated and aligned with your mission and vision, consider the following questions:

✓ Is the link between our strategies, vision and mission clear?

✓ Are our strategies concise and easy to understand?

✓ Do our strategies focus on specific areas of business?

✓ Are we seeing the results we anticipated as we implement our strategies?

LEADING PRACTICE

Develop strategies through layers that relate the goals and objectives to the vision

The Municipality of Brockton created a visual pyramid for its Sustainable Strategic Plan (http://tinyurl.com/brocktonexample; page 4). The visual shows the linkage between the vision, its pillars of sustainability, its goals for the next 25 years, the strategic directions it plans to take and the actions that it will need to occur. This approach helps to ensure a high level of alignment when setting goals.

- Ontario

EXECUTING THE STRATEGY

19. WHAT KIND OF MECHANISMS DO WE NEED TO MONITOR AND ADJUST OUR STRATEGY?

Organizing the data received from targets and measures is a vital step in reporting the progress of a municipality. This data can be used to make important improvements to municipal programs and services.

WHY MEASURE STRATEGY?

- Tracking the progress of a municipality is very difficult without well thought out specific measures and objectives.

- Measures with accompanying targets provide evidence of progress.

- Developing specific measures and targets that are meaningful to residents makes strategic directions actionable and measurable.

- The objectives of a municipal strategy should show what will be accomplished during implementation.

HOW TO MONITOR STRATEGY

1. Determine which key measures are needed to monitor the municipal strategy (see examples).

2. Organize key measures into a reporting system – this may include the of available or new technology to allow for active reporting (see leading practice examples on the following page).

3. Establish regular reporting periods (i.e. monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly) for progress on the municipal strategy. This allows Councils and Administrations to make adjustments as needed to the strategy.

4. Adjust and refresh the strategy as needed. At a minimum, the strategy should undergo an annual review to ensure it is aligned with the current state of the municipality.

EXAMPLES OF MEASURES

- ✓ Total participant hours for recreational programs – Town of Oakville

- ✓ Operating costs of fire service per $1,000 of assessment – City of Thunder Bay

- ✓ % of renewable energy produced and consumed – City of Medicine Hat

- ✓ Amount of dividend produced by the equity pool – City of Medicine Hat

- ✓ Number of citizens who use public transit – City of Edmonton

- ✓ Liters of water per day – City of Calgary

LEADING PRACTICE

Software is used to effectively implement strategy

The City of Lloydminster uses cloud-based software to enhance their implementation of strategic plans by improving the capability of the municipality to track and report. This software allows various departments to share accountability in real time.

- Alberta

Progress reports on the Strategic Plan are provided to Council Annually

The York Region provides Council with regular progress reports that provide a snapshot of seven interconnected, strategic priority areas that are critical to the well-being of the residents of the region.

- Ontario

Annual progress reports are publically available

Administrative staff of the Municipality of Durham prepare annual reports of the progress achieved on their Strategic Plan, along with summary documents that are available publically on the municipality's web site.

- Ontario

Balanced score cards

A balanced Scorecard is a tool used to improve focus on Ottawa Council's strategic priorities. The City Balanced Scorecard supplements the City Strategy Map with performance measures and targets.

- Ontario

Citizen feedback

Coral Springs won the Malcom Baldrige National Quality Award for their success in obtaining input from the community on citizen priorities and linking it to their performance measurement processes.

- USA

20. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATION IN IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING THE STRATEGY?

It is important to clearly define the roles of Council and Administration in implementing and monitoring municipal strategy. Having clear roles allows Council and Administration to effectively implement and monitor strategy.

ROLE DEFINITION

- Council and Administration should start with the shared understanding that each group has a separate and distinct role in implementing and monitoring strategy.

- The roles of each are outlined in the following table:

	Role of Administration	Role of Council
Implementing	■ Directly implement initiatives outlined in the municipal strategy	■ Oversee the implementation of initiatives in the strategy
Monitoring & Reporting	■ Determine appropriate reporting mechanisms, provide regular reports to Council ■ Review progress and provide recommendations to council	■ Approve reporting mechanisms and reporting intervals ■ Review reports and recommendations and provide guidance on priority areas.
Refreshing	■ Review strategy at regular intervals to ensure it is up to date. ■ Provide recommendations to Council	■ Review recommendations for changes and decide where action will be taken.

LEADING PRACTICE

Clearly defined roles for Council and Administration

As outlined by the union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, Council and Administration have separate and distinct roles in municipal strategy as follows:

✓ Councils participate in the early planning stages of strategic planning and review the process that will be used to develop a strategic plan.

✓ Administration designs and leads all aspects of the municipal strategic planning process. This includes preparing the draft plan, presenting the draft plan to Council, and implementing the final strategic plan.

- Nova Scotia