Strategic Planning in Uncertain Times

Why Strategic Planning Still Matters—Especially Now

In a world that feels increasingly unpredictable—from climate instability and social upheaval to economic and political uncertainty—strategic planning may feel like a futile exercise. How can you chart a course when the landscape is constantly changing?

Yet it is precisely because of uncertainty that strategic planning is essential. A strong plan doesn't promise control over externalities, but it does guide teams through complex, shifting circumstances with clarity of purpose, alignment of energy, and adaptability in our changing world.

At Lens, we help mission-driven organizations move beyond traditional, rigid planning models and into a regenerative approach to strategy. This method honors complexity and leverages uncertainty, focusing on long-term potential.

What is a good strategic plan?

A good strategic plan does more than check boxes or list initiatives. It should help an organization reach its potential by guiding individuals and teams toward your desired future in a way that reinforces your essence, values, and purpose.

Through our work facilitating strategic planning processes, we've seen that successful plans in uncertain times are:

- Rooted in Essence
- Memorable
- Inspiring
- Actionable
- Forward-Looking

Let's explore each...



Rooted in Essence: A Vision True to Who You Are

Successful strategic plans grow from the very core of an organization—its essence. This essence is more than mission, vision, and values; it's the distinctive DNA that defines who you are, what you stand for, and what potential you hold. When a plan is rooted in essence, it feels authentic, natural, and full of possibility. It doesn't just describe what you do, it reflects why you exist and what you're capable of becoming.

What makes a plan rooted in essence?

- Discovery at the core
  We uncover the organization's unique identity through reflection, dialogue, and shared stories.
- Authentic alignment
  Every goal and action connects back to what makes the organization truly distinctive.
- Aspirational potential
  Rooted in essence, the plan looks forward—inviting growth, innovation, and the fulfillment of purpose.

Memorable: Simplicity That Guides Action

Too often, strategic plans are long, jargon-heavy, and forgotten soon after they're approved. Memorable plans are clear, coherent, and easy to reference—because they're designed to be used.

What makes a plan memorable?

- Clear language
  A good plan stands on its own, allowing anyone within the organization to read and digest it without further explanation. We iteratively craft plans with client teams to ensure language is clear and concise.
- Coherence
  The plans that make the most significant impact are those that align goals and actions with an organization's essence, values and purpose. These nested systems enable actions to reinforce one another while minimizing dissonance.
- Less is more
  The essence of your plan should fit on one page. If your team can't summarize it, they can't live it.



Inspiring: A Vision People Want to Build

Inspiring plans aren't built behind closed doors. They emerge from participatory processes that reflect diverse voices and shared values. When people are part of shaping the plan, they're more committed to making it a reality.

What makes a plan inspiring?

- A robust discovery process
  We listen deeply, surface insights, and engage multiple perspectives.
- A compelling vision
  We bring teams together to craft plans that imagine a better future and invite people to take action.
- A clear call to action
  Your plan should show how it will come to life: whether through a 3-year roadmap or a 10-year strategic framework.

Actionable: Guiding Real-World Change

Ultimately, strategic plans are only as successful as the real-world action that they inspire. A good plan should guide individuals across an organization to take action to support collective movement toward a desired future state. This doesn't mean that the plan should spell out every step that's taken. Rather, it should act as a north star, empowering individuals to navigate forward together.

What makes a plan actionable?

- Relevance
  Each individual within an organization should be able to see themselves in the plan, clearly understanding how it impacts their day-to-day work.
- Nested systems
  It encourages mutually reinforcing actions at multiple levels, from changes in daily habits to policy and procedure changes to culture and mindset shifts.
- Flexibility
  Our plans incorporate feedback loops that allow for learning and adjustment over the life of the plan, allowing actions to evolve in response to both experimentation and externalities. This is especially important for long-range plans.

Forward-Looking: Regenerating Capacity, Not Just Solving Problems

Too often, strategic planning is framed as problem-solving: fix what's broken, close the gaps, hit the metrics. But at Lens, we work with organizations to move beyond a "do-good" paradigm toward one that is regenerative, growing the capacity of people, systems, and communities over time.

It focuses on potential, not problems.

- It asks: What do we want to grow? What do we want to leave behind?
- It builds resilience, not just efficiency.
- It's designed to be adaptable and flexible.
- It invites innovation, learning, and evolution.

Our regenerative planning approach is rooted in living systems thinking, participatory design, and frameworks that support long-term vision while enabling near-term action.

Case Studies: Regenerative Planning in Action

Trajectory
Lens partnered with an AEC organization to co-create a vision for the future during a leadership transition. Through a values-driven process with a robust and inclusive discovery phase, we helped staff and the organization's board of trustees clarify mission, vision, and values. Together, we developed a plan that energized internal stakeholders while focusing on external impact.

AIA Utah
Working with a membership organization navigating diverse perspectives, we facilitated a strategic visioning process that led to a unifying and future-oriented plan aligned with evolving industry needs.

The Climate Toolkit
We continue to guide a collaborative network of institutions in defining shared goals around climate action—prioritizing regenerative approaches to adaptability and peer learning to ensure the strategy could evolve.



Conclusion:
Planning as a Regenerative Practice

In uncertain times, strategic planning is a lever for resilience and relevance.

At Lens, we don't deliver static plans. We co-create living strategies that help purpose-driven organizations stay focused and inspired. By integrating systems thinking, collaborative design, and actionable frameworks, we unlock ways to grow your capacity—not just your to-do list.

Interested in what regenerative planning could look like for your organization? Let's co-create a regenerative strategy.



Sonja Bochart
IIDA, LEED AP, LEED AP BD&C, WELL AP, LFA
Director

"I work to inspire human and ecological wellbeing in the spaces we work, live, learn and heal."

Sonja has over 25 years of experience as a health- and wellness-focused commercial interior designer and biophilic design consultant creating meaningful and health spaces. She specializes in collaborating with clients to create inspirational project designs that provide sensory rich, compassionate, beautiful environments that foster collaboration, health, and wellbeing. Sonja's project work respects and supports our communities and their surrounding environment while also promoting human physical and physiological health benefits and create places of wellness. Her design portfolio includes award-winning education, community, healthcare, cultural, residential, and corporate spaces.

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"Design needs to be human-centered, emerging from a place of openness and curiosity."

Annelise is a passionate designer, researcher, and advocate for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the built environment. She draws upon her experience as an architect and management consultant to develop creative, evidence-based solutions to challenges at the intersections of culture, strategy, and design. Her empathetic approach is balanced with analytical rigor and data-driven insights. Throughout her career, Annelise has worked to translate her clients' strategic and cultural aspirations into built form on a range of higher education, cultural, healthcare, and commercial projects.

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