

Strategic Planning: What Difference Does It Make? A Snapshot of Experience in North Carolina

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Strategic planning is a management tool that governments at all levels have adapted from the private sector. It is also a relatively recent addition to the public manager's toolbox. Two books that have informed strategic planning in public sector organizations are *The Game Plan: Governance with Foresight*, co-authored by John Olsen and Douglas Edie in 1982, and *Reinventing Government*, co-authored by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler in 1992. These publications focus on strategic planning as a means of increasing an organization's ability to: meet challenges and anticipate and adapt to a changing environment, decide what is important and set forward-looking goals, establish spending and staff priorities, and measure performance and results.¹

Governments have adopted strategic plans as self-initiated best practices or as compliance requirements under federal and state grants-in-aid. For example, Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, requiring all federal agencies and many grant recipients to develop strategic plans and report on implementation progress. A 1999 survey by Jeffrey Brudney, Ted Hebert, and Deil Wright found that state administrators believed strategic planning to be the most important component of the Reinventing Government movement.² And nearly 40 percent of cities with a population of 25,000 or more reported engaging in strategic planning, despite having no mandate or requirement to do so as of 1995.³

This bulletin reports findings of a 2017 School of Government survey of all municipal and county managers and elected officials in North Carolina to discern their views on the importance of strategic planning and to determine what difference, if any, it has made in their roles and relationships. Also included are quotes by local officials who agreed to follow-up interviews.

Strategic Planning Defined

Much of the literature on strategic planning in local governments seeks to define strategic planning, identify the processes involved, or examine what makes implementation successful. Strategic planning is defined as "a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it."⁴ The process usually focuses on addressing key strategic questions, including: (1) Where are we? (2) Why do we exist? (3) What are our values? (4) Where do we want to go? (5) How do we

1. John M. Bryson, Frances S. Berry, and Kaifeng Yang, "The State of Public Strategic Management Research: A Selective Literature Review and Set of Future Directions," *The American Review of Public Administration* 40, no. 6 (2010): 495–521; John M. Bryson and William D. Roering, "Initiation of Strategic Planning by Governments," *Public Administration Review* 48, no. 6 (1988): 995–1004.

2. Jeffrey L. Brudney, F. Ted Hebert, and Deil S. Wright, "Reinventing Government in the American States: Measuring and Explaining Administrative Reform," *Public Administration Review* 59, no. 1 (1999): 19–30.

3. Theodore H. Poister and Gregory Streib, "Elements of Strategic Planning and Management in Municipal Government: Status after Two Decades," *Public Administration Review* 65, no. 1 (2005): 45–56.

4. John M. Bryson, "The Future of Public and Nonprofit Strategic Planning in the United States," *Public Administration Review* 70, no. 1 (2010): 255–67.

get there? and (6) How do we know that we are making progress? To answer these questions, strategic planning processes usually involve at least eight components:

- a situational analysis or environmental scan, called a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) or SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results) analysis;
- a mission statement focusing on an organization's distinctive purpose and how it adds value;
- a values statement on how the organization treats its clients, employees, and citizens;
- a vision statement on the overall impact of mission accomplishment on the organization or community;
- three to five goal statements;
- objectives statements for each goal that are SMART (specific, measurable, aggressive (but attainable), results-oriented, and time-bound);
- strategies and annual action plans, with accountable staff, timelines, and budget allocations indicated; and
- performance measures.

In 2007 professional staff and faculty of the UNC School of Government developed a Strategic Public Leadership (SPL) model. One purpose of the practitioner survey described in this bulletin was to determine whether and how the model has been implemented in the field and what difference it is making for North Carolina local governmental organizations and their leadership teams.

The SPL cycle (see Figure 1) connects the work typically associated with the creation of a strategic plan to the activities needed to implement and evaluate it. The cycle differs from traditional strategic planning. Rather than simply creating a document, practitioners using the SPL model will construct a series of events and processes that connects governing board goals to management actions, creates tracking systems for monitoring progress, and facilitates the accountability of management and decision-makers.

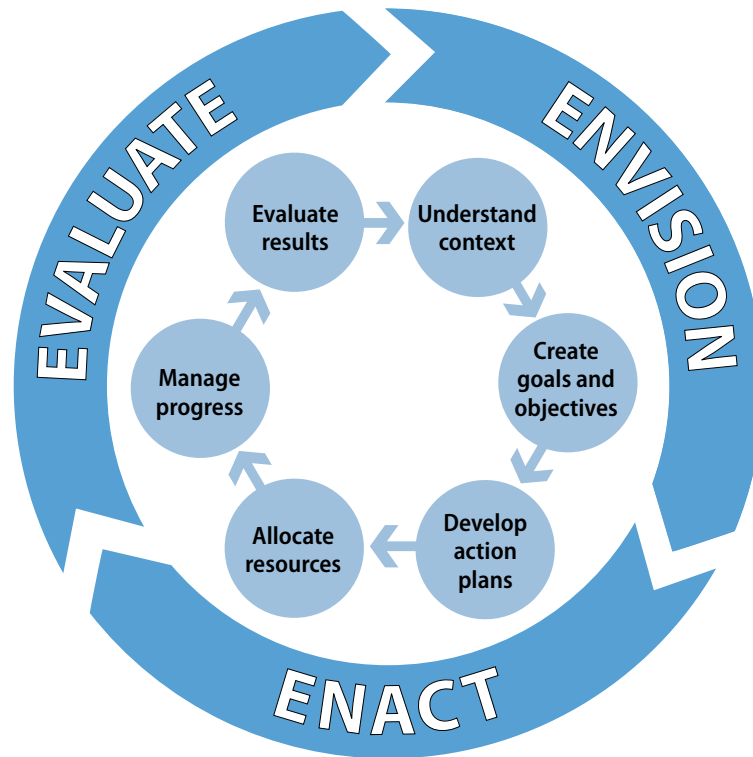
The first phase of the SPL process is to *envision* goals for the future that are informed by data and history. The second phase, *enact*, involves developing action plans and allocating resources. The final phase, *evaluate*, requires leaders to monitor progress and review results. The SPL cycle ties strategic goals to actionable priorities, budget items, and monitoring systems. And, while no model can guarantee success, the SPL cycle offers leaders a framework to

- focus on and remind themselves and others about strategic priorities;
- align resources with agreed-upon goals; and
- track performance, services, and processes that contribute to desired outcomes.

The SPL cycle produces more effective strategic plans by

- emphasizing the *ongoing connections and alignments* between the plan and other parts of the organization;
- adding project *implementation, accountability, and follow-up* to the planning process; and
- translating “big ideas” into measurable goals and action plans with *tracking systems* to ensure the accountability of staff and decision-makers.

Figure 1. Strategic Public Leadership: Setting Priorities and Getting Results



Implementation and Impact of Strategic Plans

An examination of strategic planning in the public sector reveals wide variation in the extent to which strategic planning components are used and taken seriously by public managers and elected officials. As one researcher observes, “The extent to which these efforts are worthwhile is not all that clear.”⁵ The literature identifies a number of common challenges in moving strategic planning to meaningful action. These include the following:

- failing to engage stakeholders or use their feedback;
- developing goals that are vague, too numerous to manage, and not prioritized;
- using watered-down SMART objectives;
- failing to identify cross-cutting goals and budget requests;
- using inappropriate benchmarks and performance measures;
- underestimating resource requirements; and
- unwillingness to evaluate implementation and take corrective steps.⁶

5. Theodore H. Poister, David W. Pitts, and Lauren Hamilton Edwards, “Strategic Management Research in the Public Sector: A Review, Synthesis, and Future Directions,” *The American Review of Public Administration* 40, no. 5 (2010): 522–45.

6. Bryson, “The Future of Public and Nonprofit Strategic Planning in the United States,” S263; Poister et al., “Strategic Management Research in the Public Sector,” S247; Jeremy L. Hall, “Performance

Linking Strategic Plans to Other Initiatives

Once a strategic planning process is in place, the School of Government suggests engaging in the following practices along with the plan to help integrate it into an organization's culture and day-to-day operations. In this way, organizations can maximize the benefit of strategic plans and processes.

- **Benchmark:** Choose key measurements to track as indicators of achievement toward a desired goal.
- **Performance evaluation:** Assign action steps to specific staff to ensure and track the progress of implementation.
- **Budgeting and resource allocation:** Make decisions to invest resources to further priority goals.
- **Internal and external communication:** Use the format of the plan as a tool for reporting progress to others.
- **Citizen engagement and education:** Create opportunities for citizens to hear information and provide input to either the creation or implementation of the plan.
- **Employee orientation:** Use the plan to recruit and orient new employees by explaining what the organization is working toward as well as how each person is expected to contribute to making progress through specific goals and action steps.
- **Disciplined attention:** Use the plan to help focus the governing board's attention on community and organizational priorities.

A variety of factors influence the success of strategic planning and implementation efforts. Bryson and Roering found that the following elements “seem necessary” to start a strategic planning process:

- (1) a powerful process sponsor, (2) an effective process champion, (3) a strategic planning team, (4) an expectation of disruptions and delays, (5) a willingness to be flexible concerning what constitutes a strategic plan, (6) an ability to think of junctures as a key temporal metric, and (7) a willingness to construct and consider arguments geared to many different evaluative criteria.⁷

This characterization parallels Bryson's later observation that strategic planning should be viewed as a process to be tended⁸ over time. Likewise, one of the 2017 School of Government strategic planning study interviewees suggested, “It's a living, breathing document, it's got to change, as priorities change within the city.”

Adding to the Bryson and Roering criteria described above, Burby argued that effective strategic plans involve “broad stakeholder involvement” and found that planning processes including a wider array of stakeholder input were more likely to be implemented than plans with limited participation.⁹ These points were reflected in our interviews. For example: “It's

Management: Confronting the Challenges for Local Government,” *Public Administration Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2017): 43–66.

7. Bryson and Roering, “Initiation of Strategic Planning by Governments,” 995.

8. Bryson, “The Future of Public and Nonprofit Strategic Planning in the United States.”

9. Raymond J. Burby, “Making Plans That Matter: Citizen Involvement and Government Action,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 69, no. 1 (2003): 33–49.

council's strategic plan, but it's our staff's strategic plan, it's everyone's strategic plan. It is the strategy by which we are going to move in the direction we said we were going to." And, "You can show community leaders what we're working on, and why we're doing it, and they've had a chance to have input, and if you show measureable progress across those goals, then I think that celebrating that with the community helps build trust and belief that the system works."

Existing literature has identified elements of strategic planning processes that can help improve outcomes. For example, plans with clear, easily measured objectives and extensive and ongoing monitoring resulted in more relevant plans and better organizational outcomes.¹⁰ Other elements that can improve outcomes include linking employee objectives and performance evaluations to strategic goals, publicly reporting performance measures, and connecting budget requests to strategic goals and objectives.¹¹

Otherwise, the question of exactly how strategic planning can improve government outcomes remains an area of further study.¹² Relatively little is known about the ways strategic planning has changed how local governments function, clarified roles and responsibilities in decision-making, or influenced the dynamics of relationships among and between professional staff and elected officials. Our survey sought to fill that void.

Research Methodology

To draw on local government experiences, in early 2017 the School of Government surveyed city councilors, county commissioners, and municipal and county managers in North Carolina. Two hypotheses were developed for testing:

H1: Local governments that engage in strategic planning will have greater role clarity among elected officials, managers, and staff than those that do not engage in strategic planning.

H2: Managers and elected officials in local governments that engage in strategic planning will report having stronger, more positive relationships than those whose governments do not engage in strategic planning.

This bulletin outlines our findings in these two areas and offers a snapshot of strategic planning experience across North Carolina jurisdictions as well as related practitioner perspectives.

The first phase of our study involved soliciting responses to an online survey. The survey link was sent to all 100 counties and 552 municipalities, using School of Government email lists of appointed and elected local officials.

The survey started with demographic questions such as the respondent's jurisdiction, office, and length of service. Next, respondents described their jurisdiction's level of strategic planning on a scale from "no plan" to "at least one multi-year strategic plan complete." No definition for

10. Rebecca Hendrick, "Strategic Planning Environment, Process, and Performance in Public Agencies: A Comparative Study of Departments in Milwaukee," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13, no. 4 (2003): 491–519.

11. Poister and Streib, "Elements of Strategic Planning and Management in Municipal Government"; Poister et al., "Strategic Management Research in the Public Sector."

12. Poister et al., "Strategic Management Research in the Public Sector."

strategic plan was given, so some respondents may have considered their comprehensive plan or land use plan as a strategic plan.

At this point the survey split, with respondents without a strategic plan completing one set of questions and respondents with a strategic plan completing a longer set of questions. The “no plan” group responded to questions assessing why they do not engage in strategic planning, the level of role clarity for elected officials, and the quality of relationships between elected and appointed officials. The “engages in planning” group answered similar questions about role clarity and quality of relationships but also responded to questions to assess how their strategic plans are used in decision-making.

Following survey completion, we identified six jurisdictions to participate in more in-depth group discussions or individual interviews. They included one county and one municipality from each of the three geographic regions in the state. A focus group of managers was also conducted at the 2017 North Carolina City and County Management Association’s Winter Seminar as well as a small number of individual interviews to add to the richness of the qualitative data.

Results

The survey had 299 respondents; 131 were from counties and 125 from municipalities. Some respondents did not designate their jurisdictions. As shown in Figure 2, the vast majority of the respondents had an annual or multi-year plan underway or in place. A full third of both counties and municipalities reported having completed a multi-year plan.

As indicated in Table 1 and Figure 2, while wealth and population size were positively correlated with the level of strategic planning, local governments of any economic condition or population can and do engage in strategic planning. Levels of income, budget size, assessed property values, or population size may make strategic planning easier or more necessary, but they are not barriers to the practice.

Figure 2 shows that 14 percent of the county and 16 percent of the municipal respondents did not have a strategic plan in place or a process underway. With respect to the reasons given by respondents from non-planning localities, Figure 4 shows that the budget process serves as the strategic plan in many of these jurisdictions, followed by local elected official disinterest or opposition, lack of sufficient funds to pay for strategic planning consultants, and insufficient qualified in-house personnel.

Hypothesis 1

Our first hypothesis was that local governments engaged in strategic planning would have greater role clarity, especially among elected officials. Specifically, we expected that elected officials would better understand their roles as policymakers and big-picture thinkers and would be less likely involved in day-to-day management issues. We assessed this hypothesis as part of our survey data, asking both the “no plan” and “engages in planning” groups whether elected officials were focused more on long-term projects or daily operations in their respective jurisdictions (see Figure 5).

The presence of a strategic plan appears to have the hypothesized effect, with almost twice as many of the jurisdictions engaged in strategic planning agreeing with the statement “Elected

Table 1. Respondent Demographic Information

	County respondents n = 131	Municipal respondents n = 125
Region		
Eastern	39	40
Central	67	61
Western	25	24
Level of strategic planning		
No plan in place or in process	20	25
Annual work plan in place	45	25
Multi-year planning process underway	33	42
Multi-year strategic plan document complete	30	26
At least one multi-year strategic plan cycle complete	20	19
Median income		
Under \$30,000	5	15
\$30,000–\$39,999	53	38
\$40,000–\$49,999	55	24
\$50,000–\$69,999	18	36
\$70,000 and above	0	12
Population		
County		
Under 15,000	12	
15,000–29,999	21	
30,000–59,999	29	
60,000–89,999	14	
90,000–119,999	7	
120,000–149,999	18	
150,000–179,999	13	
180,000 and above	17	
Municipal		
Under 1,000		7
1,000–2,999		33
3,000–5,999		27
6,000–9,999		18
10,000–29,999		30
30,000–59,999		4
60,000–99,999		1
100,000 and above		5

Figure 2. Strategic Planning for Different Jurisdictions

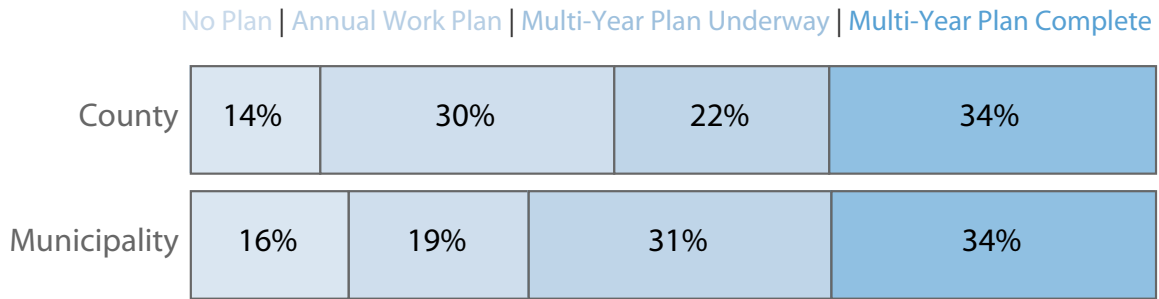


Figure 3. Strategic Planning for All Budgets and Populations

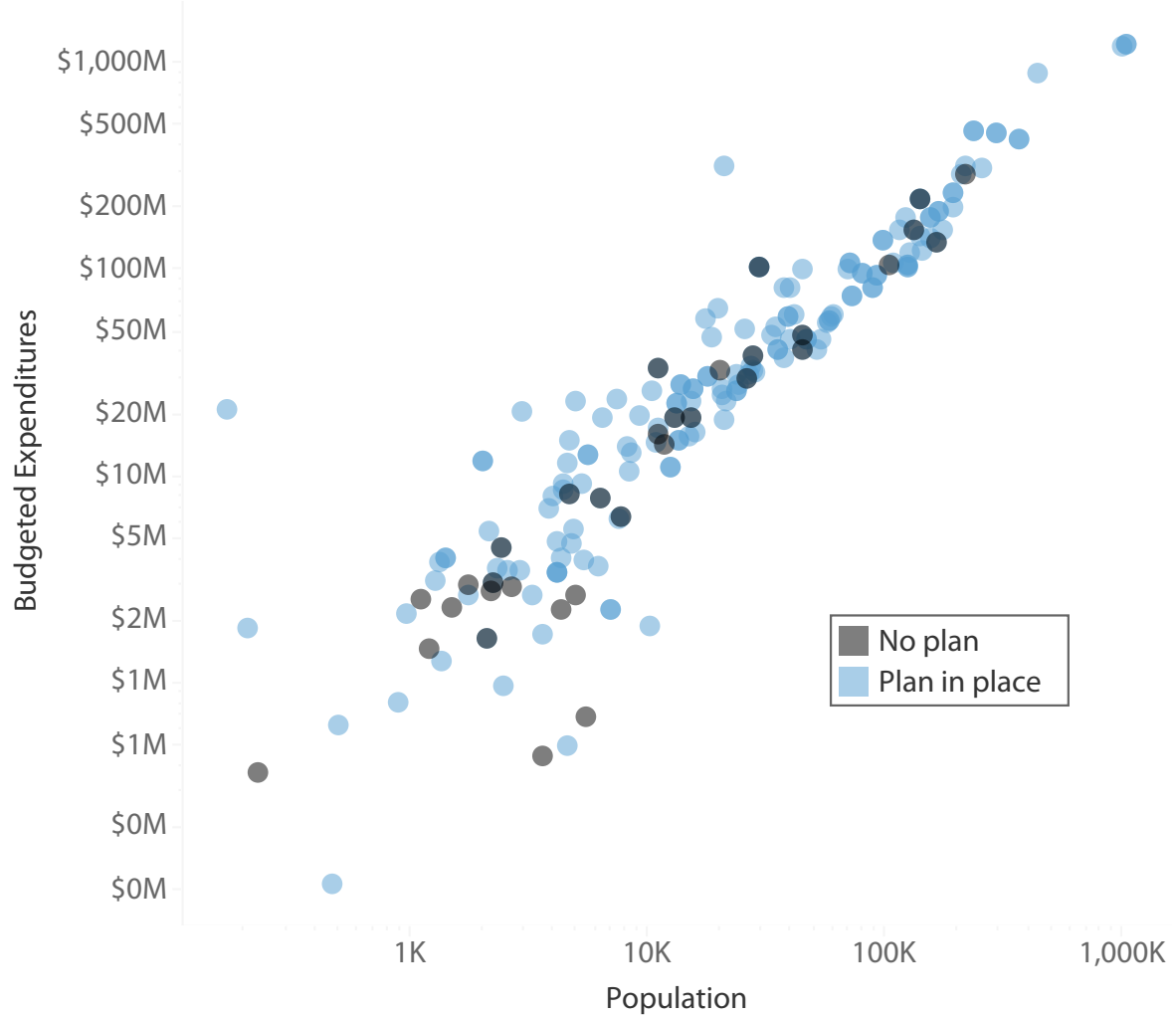
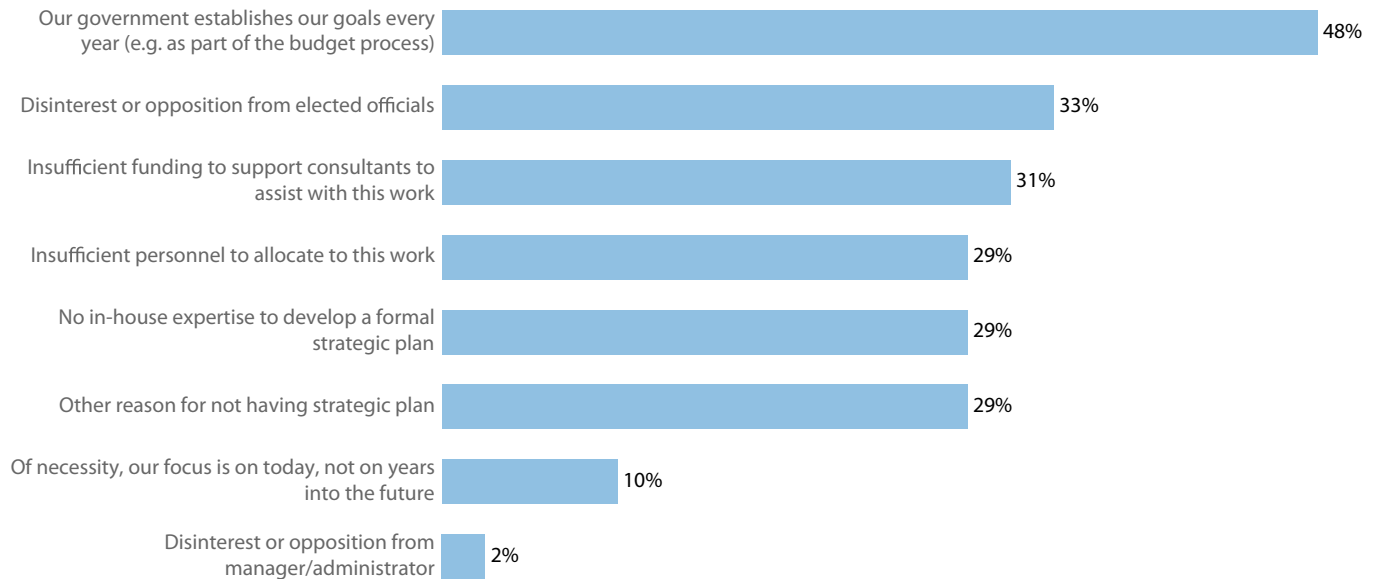


Figure 4. Reasons for No Strategic Plan

officials are focused on the big picture.” For the second metric, whether elected officials are focused on daily operations, responses also match the expected result, but to a lesser extent.

Figure 6 shows the division of responsibility for design, documentation, implementation, and facilitation of strategic plans. While the manager clearly plays an influential role, elected officials also have important responsibilities in three of these areas. (Documentation is chiefly a staff function.) One interviewee highlighted these distinctions: “Within a strategic plan, there is a management piece and a leadership piece. Management is the manager’s role, implementing, etc. Leadership is the board’s duty to keep the values and initiatives at the forefront, providing leadership to inspire management/implementation by staff.” A mayor made this observation about the various roles and functions: “The strategic plan becomes the budget. The manager knows how to go manage that and the board can trust [the manager] to do that and bring back things that they need help with or completed outcomes. It’s shifting the board up to high-level policies and priorities and the manager to the day-to-day running of government.”

Several other interviewees addressed various dimensions of these responsibilities as they relate to the interactions of departments, the management team, and elected officials.

“Strategic planning is something I can always fall back on if I don’t think I’m getting direction. . . . It gives me reassurance that, at some point in time, [the plan] was the . . . direction provided [by] the council. It’s kind of hard to find in the comprehensive plan, because most of my issues that I’m dealing with are day-to-day, hot-wire issues that need to be responded to with some degree of definitiveness. It’s a critical tool to have.”

“Departments were kind of working in silos—we’re one county—aren’t we better as one than we are working in silos? We can leverage all of our resources much better if we have a plan, one initiative that we’re all working on.”

Figure 5. The Relationship between Strategic Plans and Role Clarity

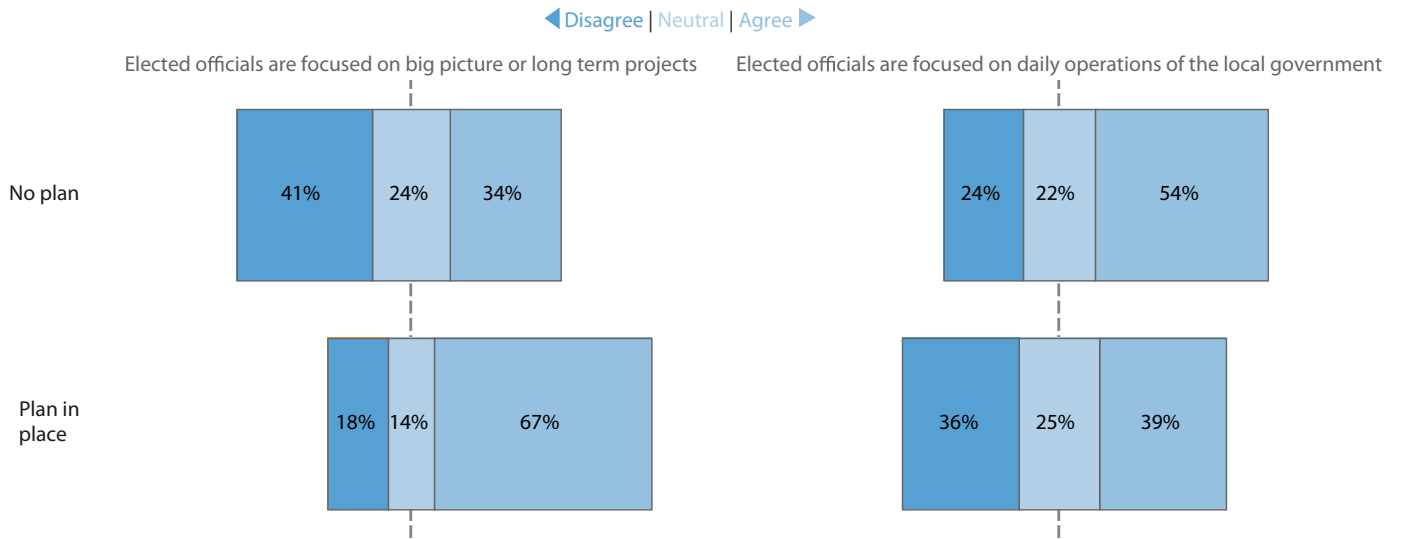
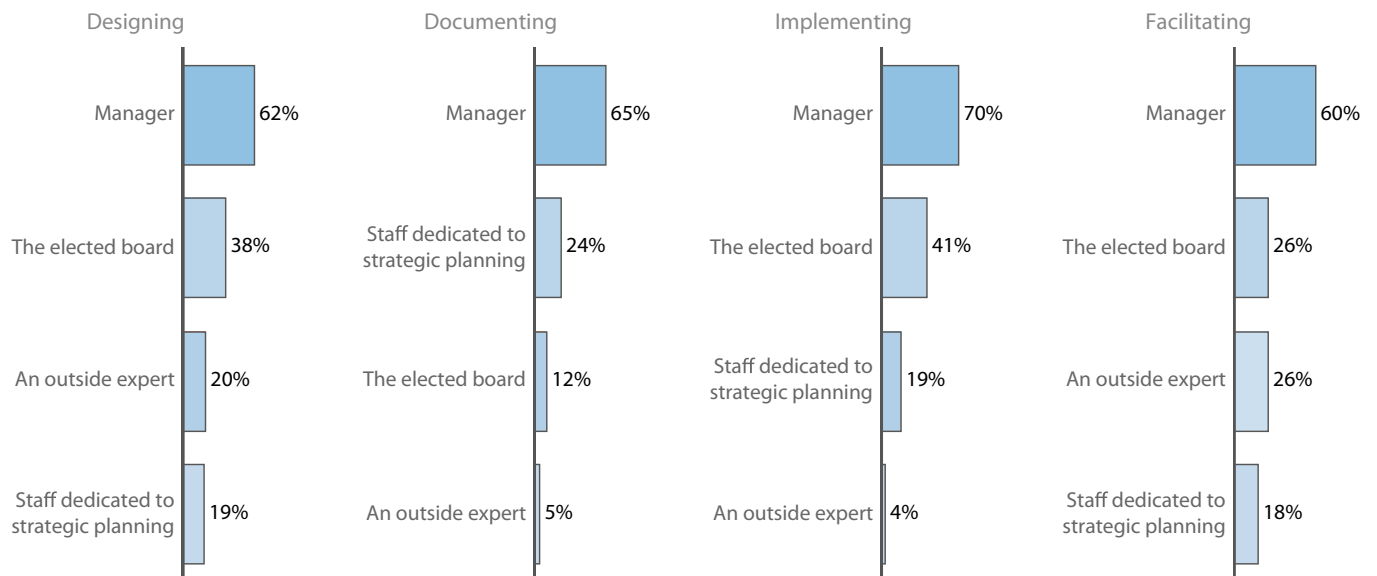


Figure 6. Responsibility in Strategic Planning

Who is responsible for the following aspects of strategic plans?



Suggestions for Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities in the Planning Process

	Primary Roles in Strategic Planning		
	Elected officials	Shared	Appointed officials
In general	<p>Initiate and commit to strategic planning process.</p> <p>Determine expectations and outcomes for a strategic planning process.</p> <p>Use a process that engages the public.</p> <p>Champion the planning process throughout the community.</p>	<p>Recognize and celebrate successes.</p> <p>Focus on why you do the work, not just the money that is spent.</p> <p>Focus on continuous improvement rather than punitive reactions if organization fails to meet expected outcomes.</p> <p>Allow flexibility in the plan to account for changing community needs.</p>	<p>Allow elected officials the space, support, and expertise to set the course.</p> <p>Champion the planning process throughout the organization.</p> <p>Align all major systems, budget, personnel, performance evaluation, and work plans to the strategic plan.</p> <p>Orient the organization to its responsibility to align with agreed-upon strategies.</p> <p>Create outward-facing report of progress.</p>
Throughout planning process	<p>Assess the implications of upcoming changes.</p> <p>Set strategic focus for the organization.</p> <p>Engage various community organizations as stakeholders to formulate plans.</p> <p>Report to the public on progress.</p>	<p>Emphasize measurable objectives and outcomes.</p> <p>Allow plan and process to clarify roles and minimize occasion for confusion.</p> <p>Use the plan to tell the story of your organization and community.</p>	<p>Anticipate upcoming changes with potential community impact.</p> <p>Offer professional advice about implications.</p> <p>Alert all to the plans of other relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>Find and share resources related to plans; provide technical assistance.</p> <p>Expect departments to tie their plans to plan strategies.</p> <p>Encourage discussion about the plan at all levels of the organization.</p> <p>Guide annual work plans and performance.</p>

Hypothesis 2

Our second hypothesis was that appointed and elected officials in local governments engaged in strategic planning will report having stronger, more positive relationships than those whose governments do not engage in strategic planning. Nearly all respondents (90 percent) agreed with the statement that the relationship between elected officials and the manager is enhanced by having strategic goals. Eighty percent said the same was true about the relationships between and amongst elected officials (see Figure 7).

In our survey we identified a number of indicators to assess the quality of relationships between elected officials and between appointed and elected officials. We asked if respondents could describe their relationships according to the following metrics: the relationship is built on mutual respect, we communicate well, we frequently engage in disruptive behavior or personal attacks during debate on issues, or we have personally attacked each other. Jurisdictions that had engaged in strategic planning were closer to the expected response on all but one indicator (disruptive behaviors between elected officials), suggesting that strategic planning is related to stronger relationships between elected and appointed officials (see Figure 8).

We also asked whether strategic plans were used to evaluate individual performance. As shown in Figure 9, half to two-thirds of the jurisdictions with a plan indicated that plans played a role in staff performance evaluations.

We were also curious if having a strategic plan would influence whether, or to what extent, elected officials engaged in self-reflective activities. Clearly, this has not been the case. Only 13 percent of respondents indicated that the self-evaluations of elected officials require them to assess the strategic plan.

Finally, we wanted to know how many elected bodies actually engage in any self-evaluation at all (regardless of whether it is related to a strategic plan). Figure 10 shows that this is not a common practice among elected bodies in North Carolina. Yet, elected officials engaged in strategic planning are more self-reflective as a body than those with no plan.

We also sought to examine the role of strategic planning in decision-making. The average responses as depicted in Figure 11 show that the most common ways local governments use the

Figure 7. Perspectives on Relationships and Strategic Goals

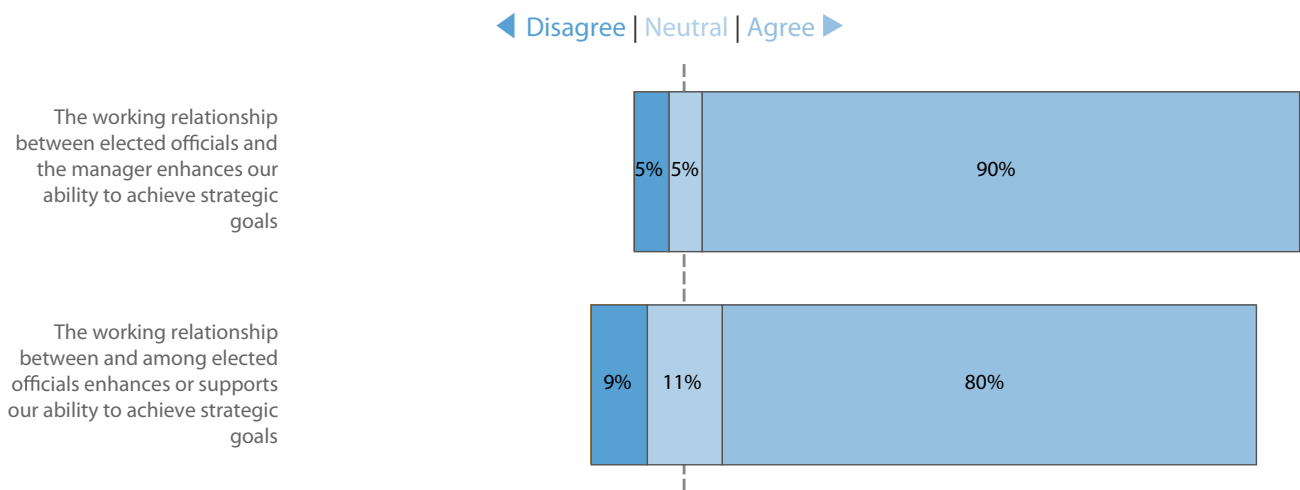
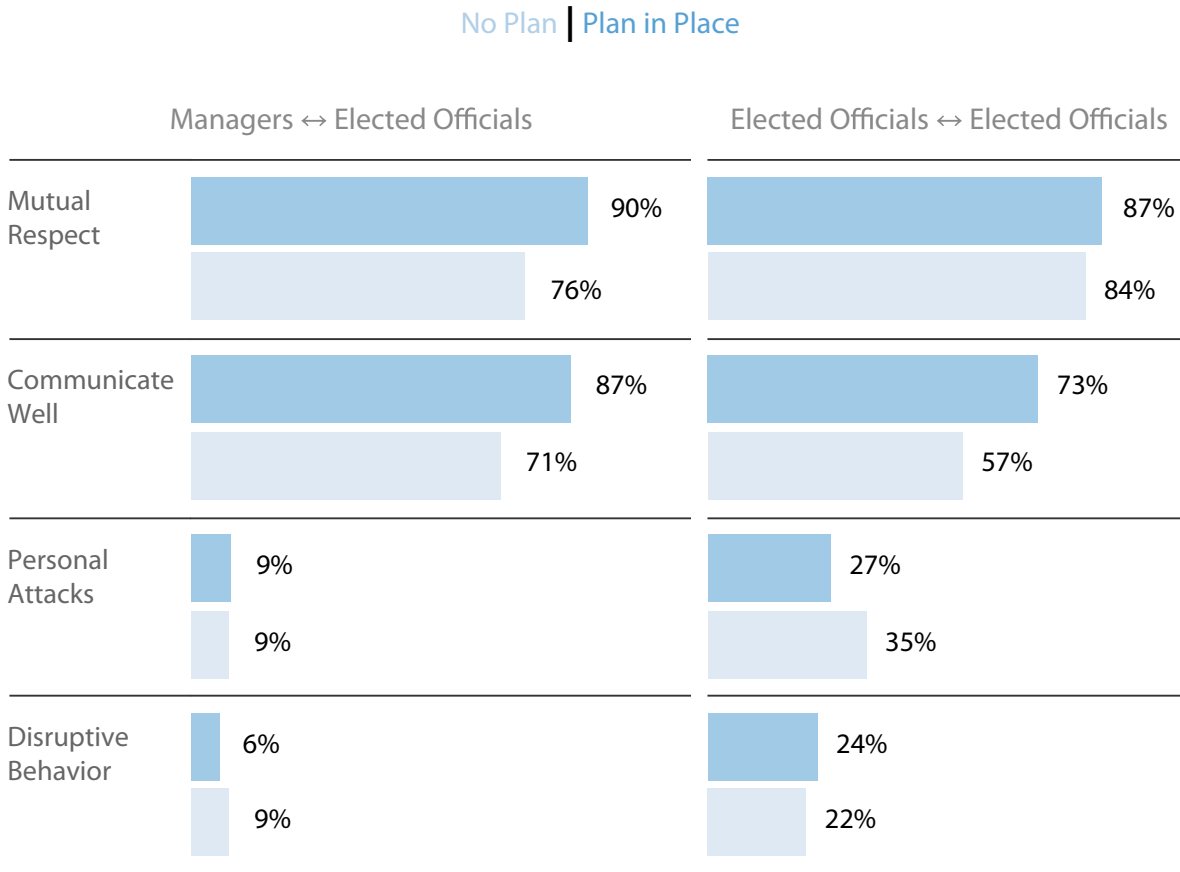


Figure 8. Quality of Relationships between Appointed and Elected Officials Based on Presence of Strategic Plan (Percent Agreeing)



strategic plan in decision-making are in allocating revenue, ensuring both appointed and elected officials are supportive of achieving plan goals, and incorporating references to strategic goals in meeting agendas.

We also found that decision-making practices were correlated with each other in this context, meaning that if a local government includes the strategic plan in one decision-making process, it is likely to incorporate the plan in other processes as well.

Two interviewees reported the following positive impacts:

“The board understands and supports what’s in the plan. They were very methodical in developing it and very serious about what’s in there. They expect plan priorities to show up in developmental work plans.”

“When we have budget requests come in, we take this plan very seriously. So every budget request—this season we ask that every one, almost, be linked to the strategic plan in some form or fashion. . . . We focus mainly on what the city’s priorities are, and we try and do our best to get more of the strategic plan things funded, or shift resources where we can.”

Figure 9. Plans and Performance Evaluations



Figure 10. Self-Reflection Practices of Elected Officials as a Body

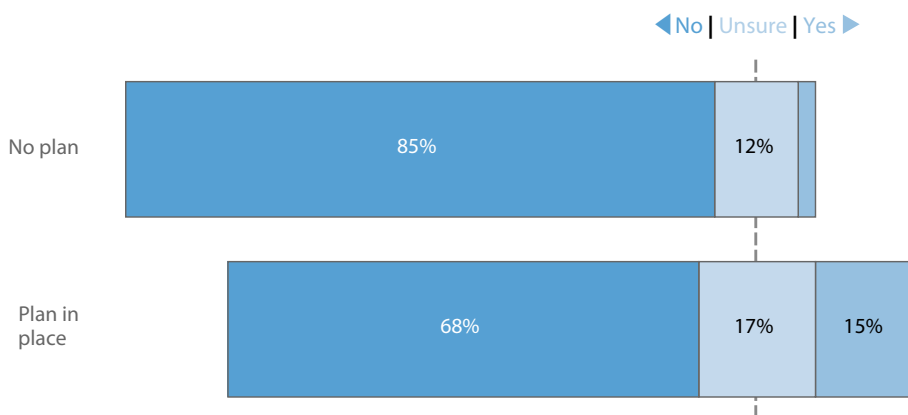
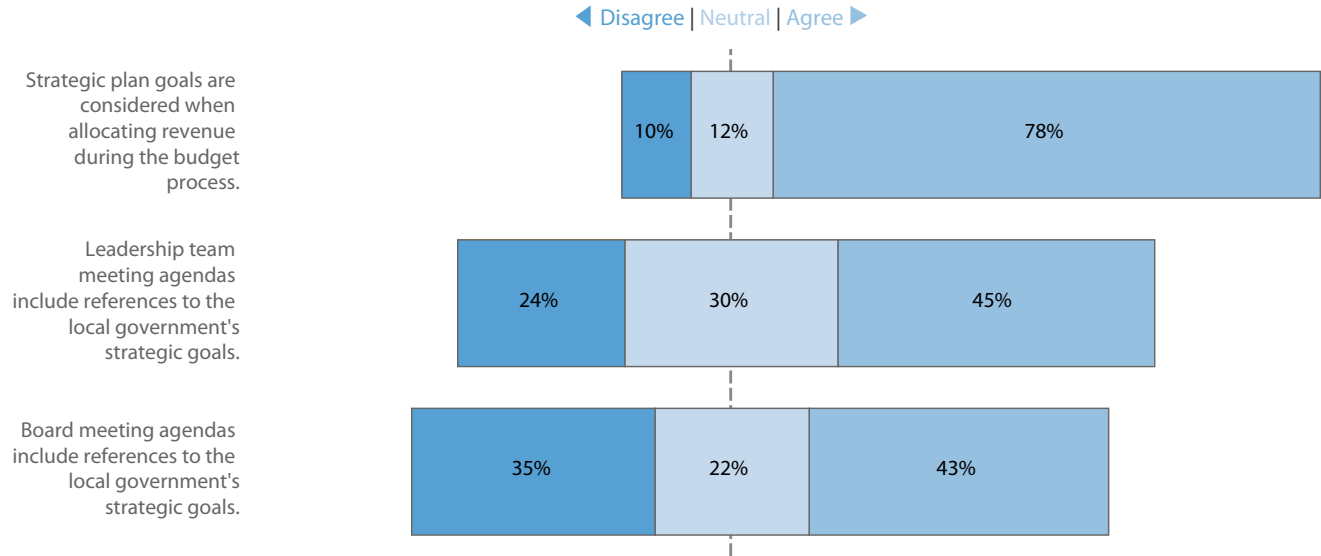


Figure 11. Strategic Plans and Decision-Making Practices

Key Findings at a Glance

Organizations that engage in strategic planning were at least slightly more likely to report the following about their jurisdictions:

- Elected officials engage in self-review as a body.
- The relationship between elected officials is based on mutual respect.
- Elected officials communicate well.
- Elected officials are focused on the big picture.
- Elected officials are not involved in day-to-day management issues.
- Elected official–manager relationships are based on mutual respect.
- There are generally no disruptive or negative interactions between managers and elected officials.
- Managers and elected officials do not engage in personal attacks.
- The manager and elected officials communicate well.

Organizations with strategic plans also generally agree with the following statements:

- The relationship between elected officials supports the strategic plan.
- The relationship between manager and elected officials supports the strategic plan.
- The strategic plan is embedded in the budget.
- The manager's evaluation is based at least in part on the strategic plan.

New Insights

As researchers, what insights have we gained from this snapshot from the field?

Expected Findings

Expected findings include the following:

- Strategic planning is possible regardless of a jurisdiction's population size or budget.
- Relationships and role clarity between managers and elected officials are improved somewhat when plans are in place.
- The most likely way that local governments link plans to decision-making is through budget allocations.
- Managers play the biggest role overseeing a strategic planning process from start to finish; however, elected officials and others contribute to varying degrees throughout the process.

Unexpected Findings

Unexpected findings include the following:

- **Elected bodies in jurisdictions with strategic planning are more likely to self-reflect about their own performance.** Overall, elected officials are not very likely to engage in self-evaluation as a body. This is consistent with our experience working with elected bodies. But apparently having a plan in place makes such self-evaluation more likely than if no plan existed. We find this encouraging and hope that as more jurisdictions adopt strategic plans, elected bodies will use the plans to gauge their own performance over time.
- In jurisdictions with strained relationships, the presence of a plan is not a panacea. Yet our research shows that **having a plan is constructive in building stronger, more positive relationships within elected bodies and between elected and appointed officials.**
- The gap between the perceived quality of relationships between managers and their elected bodies and between elected members is puzzling. Less than 10 percent of managers would characterize their relationships with elected officials as negative, yet **one-quarter to one-third of elected officials said their relationships with fellow elected officials include disruptive behavior and personal attacks** (see Figure 8). This finding may warrant further research.

Conclusion

Several interviewees talked about the “big picture” and long-term impacts of strategic planning on role clarity, relationships, and decision-making:

“A strategic plan crystalizes the story for your community. It provides consistency of message.”

“So [a plan and process] is a broader way of thinking, it's not necessarily so narrowly focused on numbers and tax rate, it's focused on vision for the future.”

“It’s an opportunity—local government is so day-to-day. There’s always something going on. . . . And so strategic planning gives folks in the organization the opportunity to step back, think longer-term, and prioritize.”

“If you open up the dialogue to say we’re going to talk about our future and what we want to see our county become, it kind of changes the focus from how we’re going to make sure we’re more efficient to how we’re going to make sure that we plan our future like we’d like it to be.”

“A strategic plan is also helpful in showing other levels of government (county, state) what you are doing, what you need, and how you fit in with their plans and goals.”

Strategic planning does make a difference! Overall, with respect to the value added by strategic planning, our study suggests that local governments can benefit from: (a) clearer delineation of the roles of elected officials and professionals as they relate to long-term goals and day-to-day management; (b) stronger, more positive working relationships; and (c) closer connections among a variety of decision-making processes beyond just budgeting. These affirmative returns suggest that strategic planning can be a worthwhile investment for communities of all types to make.

Appendix: A Closer Look at the Data

We have shown that leaders who do strategic planning perceive their roles and relationships differently from those who do not. However, we have not determined the statistical significance of these differences. Our analysis here assures us that strategic planning can improve local government function by enhancing role clarity and relationships, but further study illustrating statistical significance would strengthen our results, particularly around relationships.

Our first hypothesis was that local governments engaged in strategic planning will be characterized by greater role clarity, especially among elected officials. Specifically, we expected that elected officials would better understand their roles as policy-makers and big-picture leaders and would less likely become involved in day-to-day management issues. We assessed this hypothesis as part of our survey data with two questions asked of both the “no plan” and “engages in planning” groups.

Indicator	Average response		Expected response
	No plan	Engages in strategic planning	
Elected officials are focused on the big picture or long-term projects.	Neither agree nor disagree (1.86)	Somewhat agree (2.67)	Strongly agree (4.00)
Elected officials are focused on daily operations of the local government.	Neither agree nor disagree (2.36)	Neither agree nor disagree (2.03)	Strongly disagree (0.00)

On the first of these indicators, the presence of a strategic plan appears to have the hypothesized effect, with jurisdictions engaged in strategic planning agreeing more with the statement “Elected officials are focused on the big picture.” On the second indicator, responses also move in the expected direction, but to a lesser extent.

Our second hypothesis was that appointed and elected officials in local governments engaged in strategic planning will report having stronger, more positive relationships than those in governments that do not engage in strategic planning. In our survey we asked a number of questions to assess the quality of relationships between elected officials and between appointed and elected officials, which are listed below.

Indicator	Average response		Expected response
	No plan	Engages in strategic planning	
The working relationship between and among elected officials is built on mutual respect.	Somewhat agree (2.98)	Somewhat agree (3.16)	Strongly agree (4.00)
Elected officials frequently engage in negative or disruptive behavior when debating issues.	Somewhat disagree (1.09)	Somewhat disagree (1.20)	Strongly disagree (0.00)
Elected officials have personally attacked each other.	Somewhat disagree (1.36)	Somewhat disagree (1.31)	Strongly disagree (0.00)
Elected officials communicate well with each other.	Neither agree nor disagree (2.25)	Somewhat agree (2.69)	Strongly agree (4.00)
The working relationship between elected officials and the manager/administrator is built on mutual respect.	Somewhat agree (3.08)	Somewhat agree (3.48)	Strongly agree (4.00)
Elected officials and the manager/administrator frequently engage in negative or disruptive behavior when debating issues.	Somewhat disagree (0.69)	Somewhat disagree (0.60)	Strongly disagree (0.00)
Elected officials and the manager/administrator have personally attacked each other.	Somewhat disagree (0.78)	Somewhat disagree (0.55)	Strongly disagree (0.00)
Elected officials and the manager/administrator communicate well with each other.	Somewhat agree (2.81)	Somewhat agree (3.21)	Strongly agree (4.00)

On all but one indicator jurisdictions engaged in strategic planning were closer to the expected response, suggesting that strategic planning is related to stronger relationships between elected and appointed officials.

We also sought to examine the role strategic planning made in decision-making. To do this we asked local governments engaged in strategic planning the following questions.

Indicator	Average response	Expected response
Elected officials' self-evaluation or self-review requires them to assess their use or implementation of the strategic plan.	(0.46)	Yes (2.00)
Department heads' performance evaluations include an assessment of progress toward or accomplishment of strategic plan goals.	(1.33)	Yes (2.00)
Performance evaluations for other staff include an assessment of progress toward or accomplishment of strategic plan goals.	(1.25)	Yes (2.00)
The manager's/administrator's performance evaluation includes an assessment of progress toward or accomplishment of strategic plan goals.	(1.47)	Yes (2.00)

Note: 0: No 1: Unsure 2: Yes

Indicator	Average response	Expected response
The working relationship between and among elected officials enhances or supports our ability to achieve strategic goals.	Somewhat agree (3.11)	Strongly agree (4.00)
Strategic plan goals are considered when allocating revenue during the budget process.	Somewhat agree (2.98)	Strongly agree (4.00)
Board meeting agendas include references to the local government's strategic goals.	Neither agree nor disagree (2.12)	Strongly agree (4.00)
Leadership team meeting agendas include references to the local government's strategic goals.	Neither agree nor disagree (2.29)	Strongly agree (4.00)
The working relationship between elected officials and the manager/administrator enhances or supports our ability to achieve strategic goals.	Somewhat agree (3.44)	Strongly agree (4.00)

These average responses show that the most common ways local governments incorporate the strategic plan into decision-making practices are to consider the plan when allocating revenue and ensure both appointed and elected officials are supportive of achieving plan goals.

We also ran a correlation matrix for these responses and found that these decision-making factors were correlated with each other, meaning that if a local government includes the strategic plan in one decision-making process, they are likely to incorporate the plan in other processes as well.