

# 3 Ways to Transform Your Board Strategic Planning Session

## REFINING YOUR PURPOSE AND DEFINING YOUR HOPED-FOR OUTCOMES IS JOB NO. 1.

BY CAROLYN REEVES



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Strategic planning sessions are an absolute must for credit union leaders looking to chart a course for their organization's future. When done right, these meetings can become the foundation for growth, long-term sustainability and success. However, conventional approaches can often fail to fully leverage the potential of these sessions, leaving untapped opportunities for engagement and collaboration on the table and leading to less-than-ideal results.

Drawing on my extensive experience facilitating strategic planning sessions and my in-depth understanding of creating meaningful experiences, I have uncovered three approaches to take your board's strategic planning sessions from ordinary to extraordinary. In this article, I provide practical advice that guides credit union executives toward a more focused, engaging and successful board strategic planning experience.

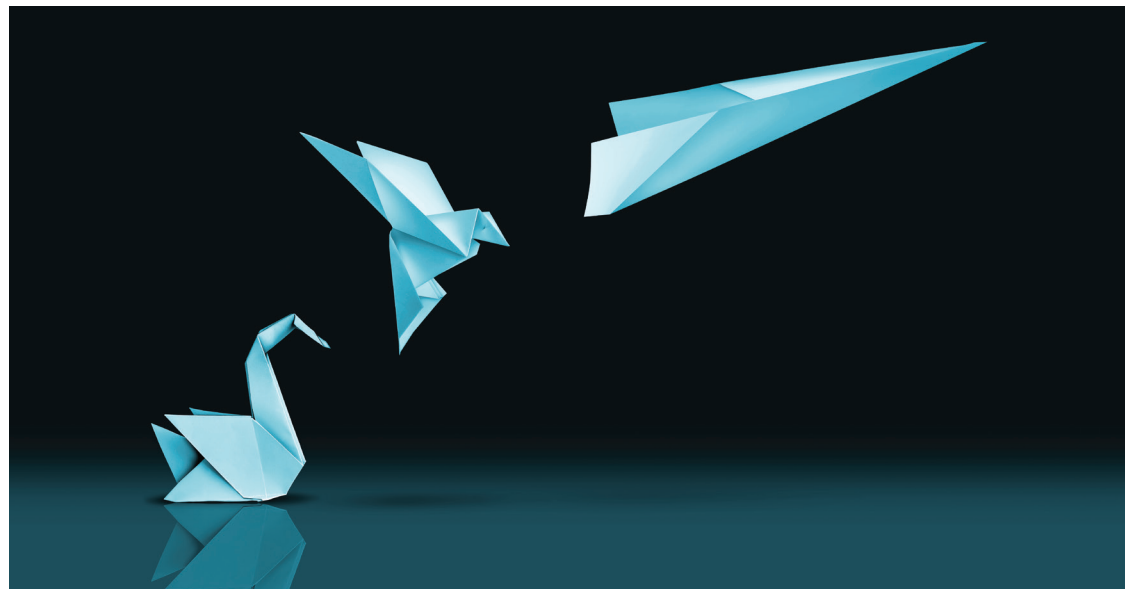
Although we're focusing on board planning meetings here, it's worth noting that these concepts can be applied to any organizational planning session or gathering. So, whether you're strategizing with your team or planning your next

organizational gathering, these principles will still hold true and help create successful outcomes.

### PURPOSE, OUTCOMES

The key to any successful strategic planning session is to start with a clear purpose and desired outcomes. This approach ensures alignment with the expectations of board members. Understanding the "why" behind the session and setting goals for the tangible results you will achieve will drive more productive discussions and significantly increase the likelihood of the session achieving positive results.

For instance, if your primary focus is to establish your credit union's strategy, it becomes important to note that a planning session typically involves more in-depth discussions than a board retreat allows. While a planning session is concentrated on formulating a strategic vision and charting a future course, a retreat is more geared toward reviewing existing goals and objectives, evaluating progress, fostering team cohesion and cultivating a positive atmosphere. You can capture the board's attention by clearly stating the session's objectives, encourag-



ing participation and creating an environment for engaging conversations.

**AN ENGAGING AGENDA**

Prioritizing collaboration and engagement when planning your board strategy session agenda is fundamental to ensuring the session is productive.

Involve board members and allow them to shape the session’s agenda. Make them feel heard and valued by asking for their input on the discussion topics. For example, you can send out a survey before the session to get their priorities.

The meeting agenda serves as a platform for developing the strategic planning session and should include a range of activities to ensure the meeting remains dynamic and engaging. Incorporating interactive discussions, group activities and practical examples into the session will stimulate creativity and foster open communication among attendees.

As an example, consider including a “future scenario exploration” activity. Form small groups and assign each to envision the CU’s landscape a decade ahead.

Each group can explore a distinct scenario, such as delivering extraordinary service through artificial intelligence, operating in a cashless society, succeeding or not succeeding at connecting with members of Gen Z, or being a credit union in a world where blockchain technology has ascended. Subsequently, teams can present their scenarios to the larger group, likely sparking thought-provoking discussions on potential strategies.

Create an agenda for the session that balances the need for meaningful discussions with the fact that attendees have limited attention spans. Break up the schedule into focused chunks to ensure efficiency and relevance, with each block devoted to a particular strategic area. Be sure to take breaks throughout the session to assist in keeping everyone’s focus and energy up.

**GET INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION**

Fostering an environment where every voice is heard is vital for constructive conversations. Creating a space that invites open dialogue and active participation allows for different points of view to be considered, which leads to more innovative solutions. Having a successful board strategic planning session requires involve-

ment from both board members and executive leadership. This promotes better governance and well-balanced decisions, as multiple perspectives are considered.

Organizing a “world café” can be an effective way to get everyone involved in creating a plan for the CU. Set up tables with facilitators at each and give each a specific discussion topic related to the credit union’s strategic goals. Have board members rotate among tables in small groups, engaging in conversations and leaving written summaries of their insights. This helps to ensure that everyone has a chance to share their ideas and contribute to the outcomes.

Board members bring a unique mix of talents and experiences to their roles. To ensure everyone has the same understanding, try connecting new ideas to things they already know or understand. This helps build a bridge between existing knowledge and the latest information.

You could illustrate the new technology by comparing it to other technologies familiar to them or that the credit union has already employed. This can help directors understand the ideas better and grasp the possible pros and cons of the new technology. It also gives them a better understanding of the potential impact it could have on the membership.

**ELEVATE YOUR SESSION**

Strategic planning sessions are essential for positioning your credit union for future success. These collaborative meetings drive the organization toward its desired future outcomes. Designing a purposeful and well-thought-out experience is crucial to ensure you get the most out of these gatherings.

With the right design and facilitation, your strategic planning sessions can be a powerful tool for achieving your credit union’s goals. Incorporating these three transformative approaches into your next session can have a big impact and extend its reach beyond the meeting room—helping to solidify your plan and chart a course for your credit union’s success. ✨

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