

Should you ditch your planning retreat?

Depends on what you're trying to accomplish.

Every year, hospital and health system leaders forgo their many daily responsibilities to come together for a (costly) strategic planning retreat. When organized around the right outcomes, retreats can be worth the time and expense. They can serve to align leaders, foster stakeholder input, secure buy-in, and develop social cohesion. However, agendas built around the wrong goals often render the effort ineffective or worse.

Before planning your next retreat, ask yourself, are you having the retreat for the right reasons? Or is an alternative (and cheaper) activity a better option to achieve your goals?

The Right Goals

Gather stakeholder input for setting strategic priorities



Get stakeholder support on identified strategic priorities



Craft a plan to address market uncertainties



Foster stronger organizational unification through networking



The Wrong Goals

Refresh mission and vision statement



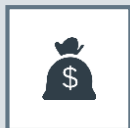
Ensure stakeholders understand health care market



Recognize employees for achievements



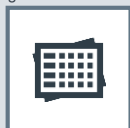
Allocate parts of the financial budget to strategic priorities



Draft the strategic plan



Create implementation plan for strategic goals



Identify tactics and metrics to measure progress of plan implementation



Alternatives to Strategic Planning Retreats



Goal: Refresh mission and vision statement

Your organization's mission and vision statements should remain constant over the course of planning cycles. The one exception is if there are significant changes within or beyond your organization—for example, a merger or acquisition—in which case your mission and vision statements may need to be revisited.

In such extenuating circumstances, rather than using a retreat, consider using email or an online survey to solicit input of your greater organization and community to refresh your statements.



Reach out to your membership advisor to learn how the Advisory Board can support your organization with creating a mission and vision statement.



Goal: Ensure stakeholders have a baseline understanding of health care market

When retreats have extended podium sessions and presentations, participants often lose focus and are less engaged in later discussion sessions.

One way to mitigate this common problem is by sharing educational information before the retreat through educational web conferences, department meetings, or emails.



Refer to our **Strategic Planning Retreat Education Guide** to learn how to frontload the educational component of your retreat.



Goal: Recognize employees for achievements

Commending employees on their work is important and can be a small component of a retreat; however, the benefits of focusing largely on employee recognition do not outweigh the cost of a retreat.

Consider acknowledging individuals through department emails, quarterly dinners, or gift cards instead.

Alternatives to Strategic Planning Retreats



Goal: Allocate parts of the financial budget to strategic priorities

The number of participants and diversity of expertise typically present in retreats is inappropriate for developing a financial plan. Participants are often unaware of the details around the organization's financial climate and are ill-equipped to make financial decisions, so making these decisions is often a waste of participants' time and complicates the budgeting process.

A small group of your organization's leadership and financial team should meet to focus solely on your financial plan.

Retreats can, however, be an appropriate time to learn about perceived threats, priorities, and opportunities by tapping into participants' collective expertise, which in turn can be a valuable input for a financial plan.



Goal: Draft the strategic plan

Similarly to developing the financial plan, the actual drafting and revising of a strategic plan is most efficient when owned by a small group of internal leaders and strategic planners rather than when pieced together as a retreat exercise.

Again, though, retreats can be a valuable forum for gathering input to guide the strategic plan. For example, participants can vote on top priorities, scenario plan for potential market shocks, or identify potential threats by collaborating with others from across the organization and thus help the strategy team focus their plan on the most important issues.

▶ Use our **Strategic Planning Template** to develop your organization's next strategic plan.



Goal: Identify tactics and metrics to measure progress of plan implementation

The input of subject matter experts, service line leaders, and staff is required for developing an implementation plan for strategic initiatives; however, inviting this large a group to a retreat is cost- and efficiency-prohibitive. Creating thoughtful, evidence-based strategies, tactics, and metrics requires significant decision-making and should thus be performed in a smaller meeting setting, where the stakeholders who will be responsible for implementation can feel involved in the decision-making.

▶ Access our research publication **Beyond the Plan** to learn how to develop a strong implementation plan.