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To: Virginia City Tourism Commission

From: Linda Ritter
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Re: Strategic Planning – Benefits and Process

Strategic planning provides organizations the opportunity to create a road map for the future. Rather than reacting to the environment around you, a good plan allows you to be proactive and set a course towards a future of your choosing. Managing an organization through reaction rarely creates the results you are looking for. A good plan allows you to look to the future, to engage stakeholders and to focus efforts on a common destination.

The planning process requires that you:

1. Define the focus of the organization.
2. Reach out and collaborate with your stakeholders.
3. Thoroughly evaluate at all aspects of your operation.
4. Identify future actions that will create results.
5. Implement tools for monitoring progress.

I have been working as a Strategic Planning consultant for over 10 years, facilitating planning processes with multiple organizations - Carson City, Western Nevada College, the Carson City Tourism Authority, the Carson City Airport, the Nevada Humane Society and the V&T Railway. I am working on the Storey County Strategic Plan currently.

I would like to share with you a planning process that I believe would work well for the VCTC.

1. Identify a Vision for the future of Virginia City and the surrounding area as a destination.
A vision statement is a clear and concise statement that is future-focused and inspirational and explains what Virginia City and the surrounding area could look like in the future.
2. Identify the Mission of the VCTC.
A mission statement answers the following questions:
 1. What do we do?
 2. How do we do it?
 3. For whom do we do it?

3. Identify broad goals that, if accomplished, will help you meet your mission and move towards the vision.
4. Identify objectives under each goal – these further define goals and describe those things you wish the organization to accomplish.
5. Considering each of the goals and objectives, prepare a brutally honest evaluation of:
 - a. Internal strengths and weaknesses
 - b. External opportunities and threats.

This evaluation will fall short if only the Commission and staff prepares it. A robust public outreach effort should part of your planning process. Various stakeholder groups must be included – residents, merchants, tourism industry partners, visitors, and others. This can be done in several ways – focus groups, general surveys, workshops – you can be creative.

6. Identify tactics and initiatives for moving forward. By looking at opportunities and matching those with organizational strengths, you may find projects that immediately create results. If there are internal weaknesses that prohibit taking advantage of opportunities, then those weaknesses need to be addressed. An honest look at threats will allow you to identify strengths that you can put into action to provide a defense. Looking at threats and knowing your weaknesses will allow you to be prepared for future problems rather than being surprised by them. Tactics are general actions, initiatives are specific tasks that should be budgeted and implemented.
7. Develop performance metrics that allow you to measure whether your tactics and initiatives are working. If you find you are not getting a result by implementation of a program or process, then STOP! Too many times I have seen entities start something and not monitor it's impact. If it's not creating results, then those resources are wasted.
8. Create a business review process that provides an overview of your goals, objectives, tactics, initiatives and the results they create. This systematic review allows you to know you are meeting your goals and creating the impact you had set out to make. A quarterly review will allow you to consider changed external conditions and make course corrections where necessary.

Those are the basic components of a Strategic Plan. I have attached to this report the plan I facilitated for the V&T Railway as an example of a plan prepared for a tourism based entity.

I want to be clear - this is not a proposal for my company. I am not looking for more work. Rather, after nearly 9 months working with the Commission and VCTC staff, I have come to care about the organization and want it to be wildly successful in the future. You will have a new Tourism Director coming on board. Going through a process like this will be invaluable to that person by providing a clear roadmap for the future.