

Planning for Athletic Program Administrators and Coaches

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- To introduce the concept of planning as it relates to athletic program administration and/or coaching
- To define proactive and reactive management
- To delineate the pros and cons of athletic program planning
- To identify the types and levels of planning
- To outline fundamental factors of planning
- To provide a sectional structure to program planning
- To elucidate the importance of the program plan components
- To describe salient, universal athletic program planning considerations for athletic administrators and/or coaches

INTRODUCTION

While planning is conceivably the most significant ingredient in sports administration and coaching, it is undoubtedly the one element that triggers the most frustration and anxiety. One often hears the expression “the future is uncertain.” As human beings, we try to avoid uncertainty while attempting to prolong the established and known. However, the essential makeup of athletics forces athletic program administrators and/or coaches to recognize and take hold of the future. Planning is that practical managerial function that deals with strategies to minimize the impact of the unknown arising from the future. Planning also provides the athletic organization with a tangible shared vision that all stakeholders (people involved with the athletic program) can reference and follow. This collective focus reduces the unproductive use of time, materials, manpower, and finances.

The number of reasons that athletic programs can fail is tremendous. Factors such as a lack of a coherent vision; poor recruiting and a subsequent deficiency in athletic talent; underfunding of athletic program strategic initiatives; intense competition and an absence of a sustainable competitive advantage; poor internal communication; insufficient coaching competency (both athletically and administratively); an operational philosophy that stresses reactive management versus proactive

management; a disjointed athletic program structure and minimal athletic program organization; and negligible leadership and internal motivation are just a select number of elements that could contribute to an athletic organization's dysfunction and breakdown. While some of these factors would seem insurmountable, they are not. To overcome these issues (and others like them), program administrators and/or coaches must construct an athletic program plan that aggressively combats them.

PROACTIVE AND REACTIVE MANAGEMENT

The planning function for an athletic organization is directly associated with the concept of proactive management. The simplest definition for proactive management would relate to activities that get the operation "out in front" of issues and forcefully take on the future, rather than delay these inevitable encounters and let those circumstances dictate the athletic program's course of action. In other words, proactive management cultivates an athletic program culture of exploiting future opportunities by focusing the entire operation through effective planning. Unfortunately, reactive management waits until the situation reaches "critical mass" and is forced by either events, upper management, and/or governing/regulatory bodies (in our case, NCAA, NJCAA, NAIA, HSAA) to spring into action (or, more correctly, reaction).

For proactive managers, planning is as much a mindset as it is an actual function. Through planning, proactive managers "identify opportunities and act on them, show initiative, take action, and persevere until meaningful change occurs. In short, people with proactive personalities are "hardwired" to change the status quo" (Kinicki & Fugate, 2016, p. 82). Proactive managers do not shy away from the future. They embrace it through strategic planning. By a strong commitment to the planning process, proactive managers strive to minimize reactionary (and often precarious) strategizing, which can lead to chaos, higher levels of operational stress for internal stakeholders, and lower levels of program productivity.

PLANNING PROS AND CONS

There are positive elements and drawbacks to athletic program planning.

Positive elements:

- Formalized planning provides a framework to look strategically into the future.
- Planning furnishes a structure for resource allocation and financial stability.
- Planning can augment internal operational focus as well as enhance the athletic program's efficiency.
- A well-constructed athletic program plan can develop strong inter-organizational cooperation between various departments/divisions.
- Appropriate planning can be used as a strong controlling element; athletic program administrators and/or coaches can compare how well the operation is doing with how well it was projected to do.
- Planning can generate optimistic beliefs concerning organizational citizenship, teamwork, and loyalty.
- Formalized athletic program planning can present a sustainable competitive advantage over athletic programs that do not have a planning system in place.

- Planning can be a way to tangibly unite individual program members' personal goals with overall athletic program goals.
- A solid athletic program plan conveys a sense of professionalism and legitimacy for internal athletic program staff and athletes, as well as external supporters and administrators.

Challenges:

- Planning accurately takes time and energy; with salaries typically being an athletic program's largest expense, time spent is money spent.
- The planning process has an enormous misconception; athletic program administrators and/or coaches take completed plans as inflexible documents. This, in turn, creates "tunnel vision" on goals and actions that may have become irrelevant or even counter-productive.
- Planning involves demanding, difficult choices. Some of these alternatives can influence the athletic program's survival and everyone involved.
- Planning deals with the indeterminate future. This uncertainty can trigger program-wide apprehension and anxiety.

TYPES OF PLANS

The planning concept can go from wide ranging and all inclusive to distinct and specific. Plans can be generated by top-level administrators as well as individual coaches. As an athletic program administrator and/or coach, one's task is to determine which plan is the most appropriate for the athletic program and level of competition.

Single-Use and Standing Athletic Program Plans

Athletic program administrators and/or coaches have two categories of athletic program plans to select from—single-use or standing plans. Single-use plans are fashioned for one-time, exclusive athletic program events, activities, and undertakings. Once the unique event, activity, or undertaking has been concluded, the plan (while being archived for potential future re-employment) is dismissed. Conversely, standing athletic program plans are interminable and not explicitly bound to any single athletic program event, activity, or undertaking. They are comprehensive documents that direct the entire athletic program toward its long-term vision, mission, and objectives.

Simply stated, standing plans need to be created for intransience and permanency. Single-use plans are blueprints for specific projects with unambiguous time frames. The concentration and complexity of a single-use plan will be influenced by the magnitude of the one-time event, activity, or undertaking to the athletic program. Additionally, all external and unique projects outside the athletic program's standing plan need some type of single-use plan (from a one-page synopsis to a detailed step-by-step blueprint) that all individuals in the program can utilize. Should single-use plans be incorporated within the athletic program's standing plan? Definitely. They are precisely the type of vital addendums that should be integrated into the appendix section of the standing plan. As the standing plan is continuously being reviewed and updated, their inclusion or deletion will be prioritized.

Strategic Levels in Planning

The strategic levels of an athletic program plan for sports and athletic organizations parallel the three central leadership levels in the corporate world. The three leadership levels are strategic leaders (corporate level), operational leaders (business level), and team leaders (functional level).

1. *Strategic.* The leader of a whole organization, with a number of operational leaders under their personal direction.
2. *Operational.* The leader of one of the main parts of the organization, with more than one team leader under their control.
3. *Team.* The leader of a team of up to 20 people with clearly specified tasks to achieve. (Adair, 2010, p.36)

One example of how these three echelons of planning equate to athletics would be in college/university athletics. The strategic/corporate-level plan would be the college/university institutional-wide educational plan. The operational/business-level plan would consist of each division in the college/university (medical, business, education, athletics, etc.). The team/functional-level plan would be the individual athletic programs within the business-level athletic department plan. To recognize which plan one will need, the athletic program administrator and/or coach should identify the hierarchical plane in which the particular athletic program operates.

The coordination in all three levels of planning relates to the concept of unity of planning. From a priority and timing perspective, top/corporate-level plans must take precedence over mid-level business plans. Consequently, business-level plans must take primacy and come before functional-level plans. This progression ensures that major organizational strategies will work together and become critical factors in lower-level plans. In *Manager's Guide to Business Planning*, Capezio (2010) constructs a "Catchball Process," which illustrates the flow of goals and feedback throughout different levels of the organization.

The idea is centered on moving or throwing a ball to various parts of the organization. The ball represents the major goals of the organization and can be used to develop more detailed plans as the ball is passed throughout the three levels of the organization.

1. *Management.* Sets goals to provide competitive advantage, allocates goals through company network, then passes ball to next level.
2. *Functional and Departmental.* Reviews and gives feedback on goals, then passes ball to next level.
3. *Individual and Teams.* Reviews goals and begins developing action plans. Feedback is then provided to upper levels.

At the end of the Catchball process, the management team has received feedback from its functions and confirmed the viability of its key goals. As the feedback loop is closed here, the information is passed down to the next level for more detailed planning and confirmation. This becomes the deployment point for action plans, which are linked to the top of the organization (Capezio, 2010, p. 35).

By employing this strategic planning flow, an athletic organization can minimize miscommunication and goal ambiguity, while focusing its resources on achieving all levels of athletic program objectives.

Internal and External Athletic Program Plans

The type of plan can also be classified by the end-user of the document. An internal athletic program plan is used by all program personnel who have functional responsibilities within the operation. An

external athletic program plan is reviewed by all outside stakeholders who have an interest in the athletic program's operation, but not necessarily in its functions.

An internal athletic program plan is extremely detailed, focused on all internal stakeholders, the foundation of the operation, and definitive in providing future direction to the operation.

An external athletic program plan is broader based, a synopsis of the internal athletic program plan, and for use by athletic organization executives, financial institutions, and interested community and business leaders.

A key to the relationship between an internal and external athletic program plan is the external plan is extrapolated from and completed after the comprehensive internal athletic program plan. The external, by being broader in scope, is a summation of the major highlights for readers who want an abridgment rather than the "nuts and bolts" of the operation.

Planning Teams

In creating an athletic program plan, it is crucial that the athletic program administrator and/or coach appreciate the magnitude of the team concept and true collaboration. Simply stated, to be a viable element in an athletic program, the athletic program plan cannot be one person's vision. For plans to be established and productively employed in athletic programs, all administrators, coaches, and staff members need to (1) be integrated, in some capacity, into the planning team and (2) actively participate in the conceptualization and design of the plan (especially within their area of expertise).

Wienclaw (2010) describes teams as "a type of group within which there is skill differentiation among team members and the entire team works within the context of a common fate" (para. 3). Compared to general groups, "team members are committed to the goal and mission of the team and have a collaborative culture in which the members trust each other. Leadership of a team is shared, and members are mutually accountable to each other," which can create a "situation of synergy" (para. 3). She goes on to define synergy as "the process by which the combined product resulting from the work of a team of individuals is greater than the results of their individual efforts" (para. 25).

From these definitions, it can be inferred that no matter how proficient an athletic program administrator and/or coach is at planning, the collective group (in our case, athletic program stakeholders) may have difficulty embracing and working toward executing the athletic program plan if they are not energetically incorporated into its development. Most people are intrinsically motivated by being included and engaged in a team atmosphere. By being involved, they have a vested interest in the results. An athletic program plan that has group input and true enlistment can have a more concentrated and amplified effort toward common accepted goals.

FUNDAMENTAL FACTORS OF PLANNING

The planning function ranks among the most significant operating components in thriving corporate settings. Through active planning, athletic program administrators and/or coaches can:

- help to understand the current situation in which the company is located,
- give a clear view of the vision and mission of the company,
- determine the strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing those that are strategically important for the company's activities,
- contribute to setting the right goals of the company,
- allow the company to be more active,

- prepare the organization to be able to deal with expected and unexpected problems,
- create a background for communication management in the organization,
- evaluate environmental issues and its changes, and
- allow the introduction of ethics and social responsibility in the strategic process. (Skokan, Pawliczek, & Piszczur, 2013, pp. 59–60)

These factors are found in practically every category of business planning. From an athletic perspective, the formation and clarification of each of these factors, as well as their employment, change from athletic program to athletic program. The remaining portion of this chapter will elucidate these factors within the context of an actual athletic program plan.

ATHLETIC PROGRAM PLANNING

Before a clarification is given to these components of the athletic program plan, it is important to reiterate that athletic program plans must have everyone's total pledge and commitment. The document cannot be a single person's perspective, but must be the vision of everyone involved with the operation and administration of the athletic program. Whether one is running a junior, high school, college, or professional program, the participatory involvement of coaches, parents, administrators, and athletes is vital for planning and goal fulfillment.

The following sections (based on Exhibit 1.1) will help a program administrator and/or coach assemble an athletic program plan.

ADMINISTRATIVE TIP

When developing an athletic program plan, solicit ideas from all internal members of the program as well as key external associates. If possible, have a yearly "planning retreat" away from the athletic program's standard working environment. This retreat will furnish an uninterrupted planning focus. As the program's leader, be equipped to guide the meeting sessions. Additionally, schedule and arrange downtime recreational activities to keep all participants engaged in the process.

Section I: Title Page

While the title page/cover to the athletic program plan might appear to be an inconsequential item to discuss, it sets the tone for the importance and professionalism of the athletic program plan. Its design should reflect the make-up of the athletic program. Items to include:

- athletic program name (school, university, club name),
- address, phone, email addresses, web page,
- date of plans construction,
- program design logo, and
- copy numbers (which are indispensable for protecting/tracking program plans).

Section II: Table of Contents

A table of contents is an obligatory element of a well-organized and functional athletic program plan. The athletic program plan's table of contents (with a sectional format and consistent page numbering)

EXHIBIT 1.1. ***Athletic Program Plan Sectional Breakdown***

- I. Title Page (unpretentious creativity and professionalism is desirable)
 - Athletic Organization Name (school, university, club)
 - Operational Address, Phone Numbers, Emails, Web Page
 - Athletic Organization Logo
 - Page Title – Athletic Program Plan
 - Date of Plan
 - Athletic Administrators and Team Members
 - Completion/Distribution Date
 - Copy Numbers (for tracking)
- II. Table of Contents
 - Major Sections
 - Sub-Sections
 - Page Numbers
- III. Executive Summary
 - One/Two Page Synopsis of:
 - *Overall Athletic Program*
 - *Products and Services*
 - *Marketing Strategies*
 - *Operational Systems*
 - *Management Team*
 - *Financial Status*
- IV. Vision, Mission, and Value Statements
 - All-Encompassing Statements on the Athletic Program's Philosophy, Future Vision, Values, and Major Operational Goals
- V. Athletic Program History
 - A Synopsis of:
 - *Athletic Organization History*
 - *Past Athletic Program Efforts and Achievements*
- VI. Long-Term Goals (3–5 years)
 - Four to Five Total Long-Term Goals of the Athletic Program
 - Broad and Measurable (if possible)
- VII. Short-Term Goals (1–2 years)
 - Specific Actions for Each Long-Term Goal (this year or next)
 - Precise and Measurable
 - Accountability
 - Time Frames
- VIII. S.W.O.T. Analysis
 - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
 - Scenario Analysis
- IX. Policies, Procedures, and Ethical Obligations
 - Breakdown of the Program's Policies (rules)
 - Breakdown of the Program's Procedures (critical operational functions)
 - Ethical Guidelines
 - *Ethical Code of Conduct*
- X. Human Resource Management
 - Athletic Program's Job Descriptions
 - BOD Job Descriptions
 - Staff Job Descriptions
 - Net Human Resource Requirements and Action Plan
 - Selection and Hiring Procedures
 - I.T. System
 - Orientation and Training
 - Performance Appraisals
 - Compensation and Benefits
 - Disciplinary System
 - Safety and Health Issues
- XI. Marketing and Promotions
 - Marketing Mix (product, price, place, promotion)
 - Brand Development
 - Target Audience
 - Marketing Communication Mix
- XII. Financial Planning and Pro-Forma Financial Statements
 - Expenditure and Revenue Projections for the Athletic Program Plan
- XIII. Appendix
 - Program Itineraries
 - Training Program Agendas
 - Timetables and Schedules
 - Booster Club Criteria
 - Legal Documentation

presents internal and external consumers of the plan with a straightforward method for retrieving identifiable program information without laboring through the entire document.

Section III: Executive Summary

The executive summary is an abridgment of the entire athletic program plan. This overview accentuates key sections of the program plan to provide readers with a summation (characteristically one or two pages) of the plan's core components. "The executive summary of your plan must be a real 'grabber;' it must motivate the reader to go on to other sections. Moreover, it must convey a sense of plausibility, credibility, and integrity" (Byrd & Megginson, 2009, p. 146).

The executive summary can be composed of

- a condensed description of the program's sport(s), services provided, and products produced;
- an abstract view of the competitive market and proposed marketing tactics;
- the main points of the operational plan;
- a rundown of the management team (program administrators, coaches, and staff); and
- an encapsulated picture of the financial condition under which the program operates and any new projected budgetary/capital needs.

ADMINISTRATIVE TIP

Because the executive summary is a synopsis of the entire athletic program plan, it is completed last, after all other plan components are finalized.

Section IV: Vision, Mission, and Value Statements

An operational athletic program plan originates with three fundamental but essential statements. They are the (1) vision statement, (2) mission statement, and (3) value statements. Each is vital to the athletic program plan and the overall operation.

Vision Statement

An athletic program's vision (characteristically five to 10 years in the future) is more than an unrealistic or imaginary view of the program. Constructive vision statements are built with tangibility and coherent foresight. A vision statement is a compelling statement of what the company is striving to be and do in the marketplace at a future point in time that everyone in the company can relate to. Focus areas for the vision statement include financial perspective, customer perspective, internal business processes perspective, and people and learning perspective. Other categories for consideration are growth, innovation, as well as core capabilities (Capezio, 2010, pp. 62–63).

Generally, these universal areas of a vision statement are pertinent components in developing a core strategy for the athletic program's future. With that being said, if an athletic program administrator and/or coach is radically altering the direction of an "up and running" athletic program within these primary areas, he/she should recognize that particular stakeholders may be unwilling or unable to re-envision the operation. To get internal and external stakeholders understanding and enthusiastic about the new vision, athletic program administrators and/or coaches should discuss the proposed vision changes within the context of the advantages/benefits each stakeholder will receive if the plan is implemented and achieved; solicit each stakeholder's input when crafting the

athletic program's new vision; take advantage of opportunities to reinforce the new vision through convincing and unremitting communication (whether that be verbal, written, electronic, etc.); and show an unconditional commitment toward the new vision.

Undeniably, the athletic program administrator and/or coach needs to guide the operation toward its new vision. Without his/her unqualified devotion, the vision will be either minimized or completely ignored (to the detriment and/or failure of the entire athletic program).

Mission Statement

Because the future is uncertain, athletic program vision statements are, to a certain degree, speculative in their make-up. Conversely, an athletic program's mission statement has a well-defined relationship to perceptible objectives and strategies. A mission statement is "a statement of the company's purpose or its fundamental reason for existing. The statement spotlights what business a company is presently in and the customer needs it presently strives to meet." To build a solid foundation for a successful business, having a written, clear, concise, and consistent mission statement is essential. The statement should simply explain who you are and why you exist (Olsen, 2011, p. 93).

The configuration and language employed in a mission statement is dependent upon the athletic program administrator's and/or coach's subjective preference and writing style. However, a properly formulated and worded mission statement

- defines the nature, focus, and intent of the organization;
- provides boundaries within which the organization will operate, potentially including opportunities or threats the organization will address, needs or expectations the organization will fulfill, services and/or products the organization will provide, the market or geographic area the organization will target, and the impression the organization hopes to make on its clients, customers, and community;
- sets expectations on how all members of the organization should behave and perform, and inspires them to do the right thing for the right reasons when making decisions and conducting business (whatever that business might be);
- helps employees (at all levels) understand why they are being asked to do what they do on a daily basis and how what they do on a daily basis helps the organization achieve its mission;
- helps customers and clients know what to expect from the organization in terms of how they are to be treated when speaking to or meeting with members of the organization, and the services and products they are likely to receive from the organization or what needs or requirements the organization is likely to fulfill;
- sends a clear and concise message about the organization's intention to various stakeholders (such as board members, investors, and prospective employees);
- helps establish mutual understanding of an organization's function and intention in regulatory filings, organizational charters, and/or partnership agreements;
- helps guide decision making and actions (relating to, for example, how monies are allocated—especially when money is scarce and programs, imperatives, and initiatives must be prioritized). (Simerson, 2011, pp. 120–121)

Depending on the operation, an athletic program's mission statement can be as transitory as a small number of direct statements (based on the above points) or as extensive as a page-by-page elucidation (also based on the above points). A succinct, abbreviated mission statement could be

beneficial for athletic program plans that are constructed for outside funding and sponsorship. By delivering a comprehensive groundwork and strategic progression, an in-depth athletic program mission statement could be more internally applicable to guide in-house administrators, coaches, and staff.

Value Statements

As the athletic program's leader, an athletic program administrator and/or coach needs to appreciate the magnitude of instituting salient, lucid value statements. They serve as the foundation of the operation's culture. In other words, clear-cut value statements are the cultural underpinning of the athletic program. Corporate cultures (in our case, athletic program cultures)

drive performance, leverage powerful histories and change quickly in turbulent conditions. Sport organizations with great cultures find ways of winning because drive and ambition lies at the heart of their identities . . . sport cultures can be re-invented, rebuilt and redesigned so that they create a productive, high performance environment. Organizational culture and identity provide an understanding of how and why an organization does things, the way the people within the organization behave, and the perceptions held sovereign by stakeholders. Put another way, culture provides a means by which an organization's members interpret the way things are done, and what happens in daily working life. It governs individual actions and behavior including how others, both inside and outside the organization, regard individuals. (Smith, Haimes, & Stewart, 2012, p. 2).

A variety of conceivable value statement factors can be the basis for the athletic program's culture. Value themes for athletic program cultural development:

- *Fans and patrons program interaction*—where there is an unqualified dedication to ethical conduct concerning fans/patrons, unmatched commitment to superior athletic program activities and sporting events for fans/patrons, “no fan/patron left behind” attitude in which all fans are valued, and ease of athletic program access for all fans/patrons.
- *Internal stakeholders*—where there is a critical respect in the workplace for all internal stakeholders, positional empowerment in athletic program positions, unconditional assistance when needed (servant leadership concept) 100% commitment for internal program stakeholder safety, and enlistment in the long-term strategic future of the athletic program.
- *Athletic program administrators and/or coaches*—where there is a leadership-first attitude, encouragement of interaction and accessible communication, development and enforcement of sound policies and procedures, establishment of a family atmosphere, and challenging but achievable expectations.

Section V: Athletic Program History

Developing a program history section for an athletic program plan might seem unproductive to some athletic program administrators and/or coaches. In actuality, this segment furnishes internal and external stakeholders, who are fundamentally defined as people who have any type of existing or future interest in the program (internal are administrators, coaches, athletes, and staff; external are outside administrators and future sponsors), with a point of reference and a progressive framework that they can follow. In other words, for athletic program stakeholders to know where the operation is going in the future, a significant starting point is with the program's past. The athletic program's

history can be constructed as a detailed narrative or a year-by-year timeline. No matter what the athletic program's record/history, it should be written in optimistic, positive language.

Sections VI and VII: Long- and Short-Term Goals/Objectives

The next segments of the athletic program plan, long-term and short-term goals/objectives, are regarded as the core components for (1) laying the program's future strategic foundation and (2) focusing direct and immediate assignments/actions for the entire athletic program. Long-term goals (Section VI) are the athletic program's strategic targets (two/three to five years in length), while individual short-term goals/objectives (Section VII) are the immediate, identifiable, and unambiguous actions that will be utilized to achieve each specific long-term goal/objective.

From a global perspective, the goals/objectives of any business (athletic programs included) will inform how the business wants to fit in with the world around it, shape the communications of the business, guide the process the business needs to put in place in order to be effective, and help in understanding the entities that will matter to the business. (Reynolds, 2010).

The actual writing of objectives can be guided by the SMART acronym. According to Capezio (2010), the SMART criteria for writing objectives "may be overused, but it bears reference as a standard to measure well-written objectives" (p.42). The SMART test that objectives must pass to be effective is as follows.

- Specific. Stated in precise, not vague terms. Objectives are quantified.
- Measurable. Measurements are included to provide targets for the objectives.
- Attainable. Objectives are realistic but challenging and provide "stretch" to be attained.
- Relevant. Objectives must link to the business and functional objectives.
- Timely. Dates for completion are included in the objectives. (Capezio, 2010)

Finally, to determine priorities in goal/objective positioning within the athletic program plan (as a guiding element for all internal and external stakeholders), an athletic program administrator and/or coach should categorize each long-term and short-term goal/objective. Rouillard (2009) states the classification of goals/objectives requires a review of each goal statement to determine whether its outcome:

- Essential. Required for the operation of the business or for personal improvement; it must be done.
- Problem-solving. Proposes a more appropriate or desired condition or ways around obstacles.
- Innovative. An activity that will result in something better, faster, cheaper, easier, or safer. (p. 60)

When classifying and prioritizing goals/objectives, utilize all athletic program administrators, coaches, and staff; their institutional knowledge on determining which statements are essential, problem-solving, and innovative will be crucial. Because miss-classifying a goal/objective can have devastating consequences, use as many intellectual capital sources as possible to focus the athletic program's strategic long-term and short-term goals/objectives.

From the above classifications, each specific goal/objective must be arranged/ranked for its importance to the athletic program. Placing goals/objectives in a descending order of importance will not only organize the section, but will maximize critical elements for the continuation and future success of the athletic program. See Exhibit 1.2 for potential goal areas for athlete programs.

EXHIBIT 1.2. *Potential Goal Areas for Athletic Programs*

Profitability Goals

- Maximizing and diversifying revenue sources
- Minimizing and controlling expenses
- Creating strong, adept budgeting
- Adopting fiscal responsibility philosophy

Market Goals

- Creating a sustainable competitive advantage over similar athletic programs with:
- Superior program planning
- Stronger organizational configuration
- Competent and motivated athletes, coaches, and staff
- Sound leadership
- Clear and valid control systems

Productivity Goals

- Internal systems design in areas such as recruiting, travel, training, general administration
- More efficient use of resources to produce quality outputs

Production Goals

Addition/deletion of:

- Sports programs and teams
- Merchandise (athletic organization and sports specific)
- Summer instructional camps
- Fundraising events and activities

Financial Resource Goals

Increasing:

- Ticket sales (season and individual events)
- Merchandise sales
- TV/radio/media revenue
- Fundraising events, activities, and programs

Physical Facility Goals

- New athletic facilities
- Renovation of current athletic facilities
- Capacity utilization of athletic facilities to maximize revenue
- Facility cost controls

Research and Innovation Goals

Researching:

- New sport-specific training
- New administrative procedures
- New legislative issues
- New technological advances

Organizational Structure Goals

Objectives to assist in facilitating:

- Effective communication throughout the athletic program
- Resource utilization and focus
- Orderly working environment with clear lines of authority

Human Resource Goals

Objectives to improve:

- Staffing systems (for acquiring administrators, coaches, and staff)
- Recruiting systems (for acquiring athletes)
- Athletic orientation programs
- Skill, knowledge, and attitudinal training
- Performance evaluation systems
- Disciplinary systems

Social Responsibility Goals

- Community involvement and improvement
- Increasing public awareness of athletic program through social responsibility
- Developing a sense of community within and around the athletic organization

ADMINISTRATIVE TIP

It is frequently asked, how many long-term goals should our program develop and implement? Because of the generalized nature and enormity of long-term goals, as well as the limited resources of most athletic programs, no more than four or five long-term goals should be attempted. How many short-term actions should be devised for each long-term goal? As many as it takes to accomplish that long-term goal. Simply put, it may take a few short-term and immediate actions to reach a long-term goal, or it could take dozens. It all depends on the long-term goal.

Section VIII: SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis, which is the evaluation of an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats, is an essential part of establishing the future direction of the athletic program. The analysis supplies a comprehensive, contemporary "picture-in-time" snapshot of the organization. While the concept of SWOT is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, the over-riding premise for its inclusion in the athletic program plan is

a tool strategists use to evaluate Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Strengths are company resources and capabilities that can lead to a competitive advantage. Weaknesses are resources and capabilities that a company does not possess, to the extent that their absence places the firm at a competitive disadvantage. Opportunities are conditions in the broad and operating environments that allow a firm to take advantage of organizational strengths, overcome organizational weaknesses, and/or neutralize environmental threats. Threats are conditions in the broad and operating environments that may impede organizational competitiveness or the achievement of stakeholder satisfaction. (Enz, 2010, p. 16)

From the definition, one can see how strategically important it is for an athletic program administrator and/or coach to develop and continuously revisit the operation's SWOT points. For this reason, SWOT is a salient component of the athletic program plan.

Section IX: Policies, Procedures, and Ethical Obligations

In *Strategic Practice Management: Business and Procedural Considerations*, Glaser & Traynor (2014) underscore the magnitude of creating and implementing an athletic program policies and procedures manual by stating that "the Policy and Procedures Manual (P&P Manual) may serve as the informational source developed for a specific individual or group of employees" and "as the basis for employee manuals or handbooks," but that "it may also be reserved solely for the use of specific managers or directors within an organization" (p. 335).

While policies and procedures are generally discussed collectively, they are two independent operational ingredients that expedite an organization's success. Policies are associated with athletic program regulations/rules that influence internal and external stakeholder actions (people focused) while procedures are methodologies that elucidate how to achieve athletic program duties and responsibilities (task focused).

Typically, policies and procedures manuals are distinct, comprehensive documents that have substantial depth. For this reason, in the athletic program plan, an athletic program administrator and/or coach should provide an outline/overview of the manual rather than the entire manual.

As athletic program administrators and/or coaches, one primary area could be to structure policies and procedures for the program's athletes and coaching staff. For example, athlete behavioral

expectations include academics, practice policies, tardiness/absenteeism, alcohol/drugs, on-court/field disposition, off-court/field representation, and media relations. Coaches/staff behavioral expectations include player relations, on- and off-court/field representation, recruiting, administrative responsibilities, and public/media relations.

The concentration and range of policy items within a program plan are determined by the team's philosophies, position, operational environment, ethical history, and traditions. Some areas may be more accentuated than others. For example, an athletic program may be a university/college team where athletes have a documented history of alcohol abuse. In this case, the policies section of the program plan may want to elucidate specific policies on alcohol and drug abuse and detail a definitive warning/disciplinary system (verbal warnings, written warnings, suspension, expulsion—see Chapter 3) for violations. In such an environment, each athletic program member should have an absolute understanding of the ramifications of alcohol and drug use. The athletic program's alcohol and drug policies should be in lucid, plain language to avoid any misinterpretations.

Procedures are step-by-step actions taken to perform specific tasks. Athletic program administrators and/or coaches should establish straightforward procedures in areas of travel, purchasing, budgeting, cash handling, registration, and other administrative functions. The biggest dividend in determining procedures for administrative functions is uniformity. Uniformity saves time, coordinates activities, and minimizes frustration that arises from disorganization.

ADMINISTRATIVE TIP

Policy and procedure manuals are only beneficial if they are acknowledged, established, and applied. Constantly re-emphasize the athletic program's commitment to its policies and procedures.

Section X: Human Resource Plan

The human resource (HR) element of an athletic program plan should be looked at as an all-encompassing (and vital) sub-plan within the overall plan. Human resource management can best be interpreted as “a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organizations most valued asset—the people working there, who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives” (Armstrong, 2008, p. 5). With that being said, Chapter 3 will be dedicated to its development, systematizing, leadership, and advancement.

The principal factors that should be underscored in the HR component of the athletic program plan include legal aspects of human resource management; human resource as a strategic function; staffing systems; athletic program orientation systems; training and development systems; performance evaluation systems; rewards; compensation; and benefit systems; and human resource disciplinary systems. Each athletic program plan for each distinctive athletic program will selectively pick and choose human resource areas to emphasize that will have the greatest impact on their particular organization's goals.

Section XI: Marketing and Promotional Plan

While marketing will be presented in more detail later in the text, it is important to review the essential foundations of the business topic here. The leading misnomer concerning the term marketing deals with the limited perception that marketing is only concerned with the sole promotional communication topic of advertising. Marketing goes far beyond that basic assumption. It is the wide-ranging operational function that “[develops] solutions that address consumer needs. . . . [Marketing]

must educate prospects about how their products and services will meet these needs better/faster/cheaper than the existing products in the market” (Venugopal, 2010, p. 15).

While there are numerous facets of the marketing function that will be delineated later in the text, the principal theory for marketing is broken down into four factors known as the 4Ps of marketing (or the marketing mix). In *Encyclopedia of Sports Management and Marketing*, Swayne and Dodds (2011) describe the topic and components of the marketing mix for sports organizations as

gathered information that serves to help an organization to make appropriate product and service, pricing, delivery, and promotional decisions. . . The product includes the total tangible or intangible outputs of an organization. . . Price is the value a consumer equates to a good or service or the amount of money or goods asked for in exchange for something else. . . Place deals with the methods of distributing the product to consumers. . . Promotion represents how information about the product is communicated to customers, with a goal of receiving positive response from the consumer, and results in product sales. (pp. 848–849)

The first of the four Ps of the marketing mix, product, is the one component athletic program administrators and/or coaches spend the greatest effort in developing. All other marketing activities stem from it. The product is a quality athletic program. People (especially Americans) can occasionally be deceived into purchasing certain products that are of low caliber and value. The one product that this country seems to consume voraciously is entertainment. Athletics is entertainment. In the most elementary terms, if an athletic program is not good, the public will stay away no matter what marketing strategies are employed. Does this mean that an athletic organization needs to have all undefeated teams before people will pay notice or support it? No. It simply means that the athletic organization needs to be competitive and stimulating in various ways to attract consumers and supporters.

The second of the four Ps, price, derives from the same logic. The more in demand the product, the more flexibility in the price the consumer will pay for the product. Simply put, the more competitive the athletic program, the more predisposed the consumer will be to pay a higher price to watch and support it.

The third of the four Ps, place, is commonly determined by other external factors in athletics such as in what league, conference, or geographic region one’s athletic program is located. Place (or product distribution) proceeds from the logical reality that the more conspicuous and in demand a program is, the more places it can be sold.

The fourth and final P of the marketing mix, promotion, is also known as promotional communication. It blends the strategic tactics of advertising, sales promotions, public relations, personal selling, direct marketing, and technology into a coherent communication mix that will best transmit the athletic program’s message to consumers and provide the most exposures of that message for the resources expended. Is funding consequential in promotion? It is significant but not imperative. Any advertising executive will communicate that the ultimate aspiration of any promotional campaign is to secure and enlarge positive word-of-mouth about the product. For more information on marketing, see Chapters 11, 12, and 13.

ADMINISTRATIVE TIP

Never blindly leap into a marketing/promotional campaign. Too much is riding on the success or failure of marketing.

Section XII: Financial Planning and Pro-Forma Financial Statements

Financial planning is also known as budgeting. Budgets are “the formal expression of plans, goals, and objectives of management that covers all aspects of operations for a designated time period” and “a tool to provide targets and direction” that emphasizes “the importance of evaluating alternative actions before decisions actually are implemented” (Shim & Siegel, 2009, p. 1).

The question is, what items can an athletic program administrator and/or coach budget? While core budgets are interested in the financial forecasts of the athletic program (projected revenues generated and expenses distributed), any asset that contributes to the achievement of goals and objectives can (and often should) be budgeted. Athletic program administrators and/or coaches can budget: facility usage (gyms, fields, weight rooms, parking); manpower (administrators, staff, coaches); equipment and uniforms; transportation (buses, vans, flights); office space; and any asset line-item.

The development and employment of budgets leads into a recurring theme of this text—athletic program efficiency. Accurate budgeting is paramount if an athletic program is to achieve maximum efficiencies. The simplest way to describe the concept of efficiency is by stating that efficiency is the use of less inputs and asset to create the best quality output. All organizations (athletic program included) have limited resources/assets. Being more efficient with those inputs/resources is a way to achieving a competitive advantage over one’s competition, and budgets assist in that aspiration. Athletic program budgeting is described in more detail in Chapter 10.

ADMINISTRATIVE TIP

Knowing and recognizing one’s distinctive limitations when it comes to athletic program administration helps to achieve a thriving program.

Section XIII: Appendix

The appendix section of a program plan can be just as important in providing salient information to stakeholders as the other sections. Information such as fundraising programs, program schedules, conditioning/training programs and schedules, booster programs and events, and volunteer activities are just a few of the elements that could be included in this section of the program plan. The extent of information provided in the appendix depends on numerous variables that are sport and program specific. However, it is important to remember that the appendix segment of a program plan is not a junk drawer section. Keep only salient information in it and maintain its organization.

ATHLETIC PROGRAM PLAN CHECKLIST

In *Growing and Managing a Small Business: An Entrepreneurial Perspective*, Allen (2007) provides a business plan checklist that should be reviewed after the completion of an athletic program’s strategic plan. The following checklist of questions was modified for athletic program planning.

- Did the executive summary grab the reader’s attention and highlight the major points of the athletic program plan?
- Did the athletic program plan clearly describe the purpose of the athletic program?
- Did the plan persuade the reader that the program administrator and/or coach can successfully implement the athletic program’s mission?

- Did the market analysis support acceptance for the athletic program in the competitive marketplace?
- Did the management and organization of the athletic program plan assure the reader that an effective infrastructure is in place to facilitate the goals and operations of the athletic program?
- Did the marketing plan successfully demonstrate how the athletic program will create fan and supporter awareness in the target market?
- Did the financial plan convince the reader that the athletic program has long-term growth potential?
- Did the athletic program plan convey a sense of direction for the athletic program?

ADDITIONAL ATHLETIC PROGRAM PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Planning Bias

In regards to planning bias and decision making, Kreitner & Kinicki (2013) state the following.

People make a variety of systemic mistakes when making decisions. These mistakes are generally associated with a host of biases that occur when we use judgmental heuristics. Judgmental heuristics represent rules of thumb or shortcuts that people use to reduce information processing demands. We automatically use them without conscious awareness. The use of heuristics helps decision makers to reduce the uncertainty inherent within the decision-making [planning] process. (p. 335)

Unfortunately, these involuntary biases can (and often) overlook salient details that will impact planning and strategy execution. To overcome these biases, an athletic program administrator and/or coach, during the planning process, must consciously recognize and delineate his/her bias limitations and actively work to see all sides of a planning decision. This introspective analysis can be helped by having other planning team members point out issues and alternatives that might have been circumvented because of personal biases.

Opposition Research in Planning

Opposition research (or in politics/debate, opposition prep) is a technique where planning group members try to poke holes in planning decisions to validate their applicability. While this technique can take additional time and energy, it can have meaningful benefits. If a planning decision prevails after an opposition research session, the likelihood of it being a sound strategic tactic increases greatly. Will this planning activity guarantee tactical success? No. However, it will minimize any possible oversights and assumptions which can lead to conceivably devastating athletic program miscalculations.

Making Tough Planning Decisions

Athletic program administration and coaching, by their very nature, have complicated and often demanding choices. The development of athletic program plans is especially arduous when it comes to challenging decision making. In a majority of athletic program planning decisions, resource allocation is a crucial concern. Determining which strategies get which resources (money, time, human

resources, facilities and equipment, etc.) can have a lasting impact on the people involved in the program as well as the overall success of the athletic organization. A basic step-by-step process can alleviate some of the anxiety involved in these critical judgments.

1. Scrutinize each resource allocation planning decision for its impact on the athletic program's vision, mission, and values.
2. Examine each resource allocation planning decision from its short- and long-term athletic program ramifications. In other words, what will be the cascading impact of the resource allocation decision (both positive and negative)?
3. Acquire as much informed input and insight from as many relevant sources and stakeholders as possible.
4. Weigh out all alternatives.
5. Make the resource allocation planning decision.
6. Discuss your final decision with all concerned stakeholders. Explain the difficulty of having limited resources and your rationale for the final choice.

ADMINISTRATIVE TIP

It needs to be reiterated that these difficult planning choices are a part of athletic program administration and coaching. Once a decision has been discussed and made with all concerned parties, every athletic program member needs to accept the decision and work within the parameters of the resolution.

Planning Security and Confidentiality

It should go without saying that an athletic program's strategic plan is confidential and all institutional information within the document (as well as crucial strategic tactics) remain undisclosed to external parties. Planning security should be within the athletic program administrator's and/or coach's purview. He/she should establish internal systemic controls to safeguard the plan's integrity and confidentiality.

Living Documents

A significant factor associated with athletic program plans is they are considered living documents that need unremitting evaluation and attention. To think of them as one time documents would be a considerable miscalculation. As the external environment changes, an athletic program's plan should adapt and be reengineered. Often times, the modifications can be minor. Occasionally, because of significant environmental instabilities, the plan will need "whole sale" changes.

WRITING THE PLAN

When writing the plan, there are many important factors and techniques to consider. Quality writing, for example, effects the reader's perception of a plan. Quality writing encompasses not only grammatical and sentence structure but wording, sectional content, and brevity. A well-written and skillfully constructed athletic program plan emanates refinement and competence. A poorly written and disorganized plan exudes a feeling of mismanagement and ineptitude. To ensure a high quality of writing, a sequence of proofing intervals should be established throughout the plan's construction.

The cluster technique in writing is also a factor. It relates to a methodology for tackling a document of this magnitude and size. The concept is straightforward. Assemble an outline/framework of the athletic program plan and allocate ample space between each section (pages are recommended). As strategic ideas develop (through brainstorming, introspection, research, etc.), “bullet out” these strategies in their appropriate sections. In other words, cluster the foundations of the plan without worrying about crafting the document in its final form. Once all information is in, rearrange the bullet points in each section for coherent flow and concentration. Finally, once all bullets are positioned in correct order, begin the crafting/writing of the final athletic program plan. To attempt to write an athletic program plan directly from conceptualizations to final form would be at best problematic and at worst virtually impossible.

Two other principal areas to be cognizant of when writing the final athletic program plan are language usage (assertive versus passive language) and writing in first person. The document is a profound statement on where the athletic program has been, where it currently is, and, most importantly, where it is going. This is accomplished with definite language. Furthermore, the athletic program should always be considered its own separate entity. Throughout the plan, it should be written as such. Stakeholders come and go throughout time. The athletic program entity remains beyond the people currently involved.

The third person rule refers to the depth and comprehensiveness of the athletic program plan. The final plan’s components should be described so meticulously a third independent party (which knows little or nothing about the athletic program) could read the plan and understand each and every element completely. This type of delineation and exhaustive detail leaves nothing to chance, especially misinterpretations and incomplete information.

If the athletic program plan is being written by multiple athletic program stakeholders, the final document should read as if it were written by one voice. Within the intricacy of composition, we all have different writing styles. Strong athletic program plans amalgamate these styles into a single approach and language.

If a team concept is being used to construct and write the athletic program plan, a concerted effort should be made to delegate plan components based on everyone’s cross functional strengths. For example, if a planning team member has a concentrated background in financial statement development and analysis, he/she should be accountable for financial planning and pro-forma statements (section XII). Obviously, the more cross-functional the planning team, the stronger the final plan.

Overall, an athletic program plan is a direct reflection on the people involved in the athletic organization. For that reason, an athletic program plan should be a professional presentation that is aesthetically appealing. Professionalism can relate to the look and quality of the paper used, the layout and structure of the document, consistency in format, the cover and title page design, and the characteristics of the binding.

PRE-IMPLICATION CHECKLIST

The following checklist provides athletic program plan tips to consider prior to implementing the plan.

- Athletic program plans should have a purpose beyond just planning for planning’s sake.
- The smaller the athletic program, the more targeted the plan should be on legitimate objectives and goals. If not, the plan could waste valuable time and limited resources.

- Athletic program plans need to have definitive long-term goals as well as concentrated short-term actions.
- Stringent financial controls should be adopted throughout the entire athletic program budgeting process.
- Athletic program planning is a continuous process. Plans need periodic revisiting to evaluate and adjust or they become stagnant and irrelevant.
- An athletic program plan is only as good as its execution.

SUMMARY

There are distinct benefits and applications associated with developing a program plan. The most predominant are to furnish stakeholders with a concrete, tangible focus for the future; to project professionalism to external groups and individuals; to provide a valuable and useful tool for acquiring financial backing for the program; to give staff members a sense of continuity; to recruit new staff members or to recruit new athletes; and to provide the organization with a reality foundation. In other words, it simply distinguishes what can or cannot be accomplished.

An athletic program plan is not a stagnant document. It should be considered an alterable and flexible athletic organization component that needs constant progressive updates and amendments. While most revisions will be minor modifications, they are indispensable in maintaining the ongoing benefits. The ability to adapt and amend the program plan to the changing environment in athletics could mean the difference between a program's success or collapse.