Strategic Planning

Ministry of Rural Affairs
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Ontario

What is Strategic Planning?

- Strategic Planning is a process that **helps groups work towards a desired future**, by **focusing energy and resources on shared goals**.
- The process:
  - *Examines where you are now, where you want to be and how to get there*
  - *Steers the group in a focused direction for future success*
  - *Encourages proactive thinking*
  - *Deals positively with change*
  - *Sets priorities for action*
  - *Establishes clear outcomes for measuring success*
- The **process is only as good as the creative and thoughtful insight of the participants involved.**

Strategic Plan vs. Constitution

- **Constitution**:

  ✓ Defines how you govern as a board, e.g. run meetings, set quorum, structure, by-laws, changes to same, etc.

  ✓ Applies over long-term, rarely changes.

- **Strategic Plan**:

  ✓ Higher level

  ✓ Plans for a specific time frame

  ✓ Sets priorities for action

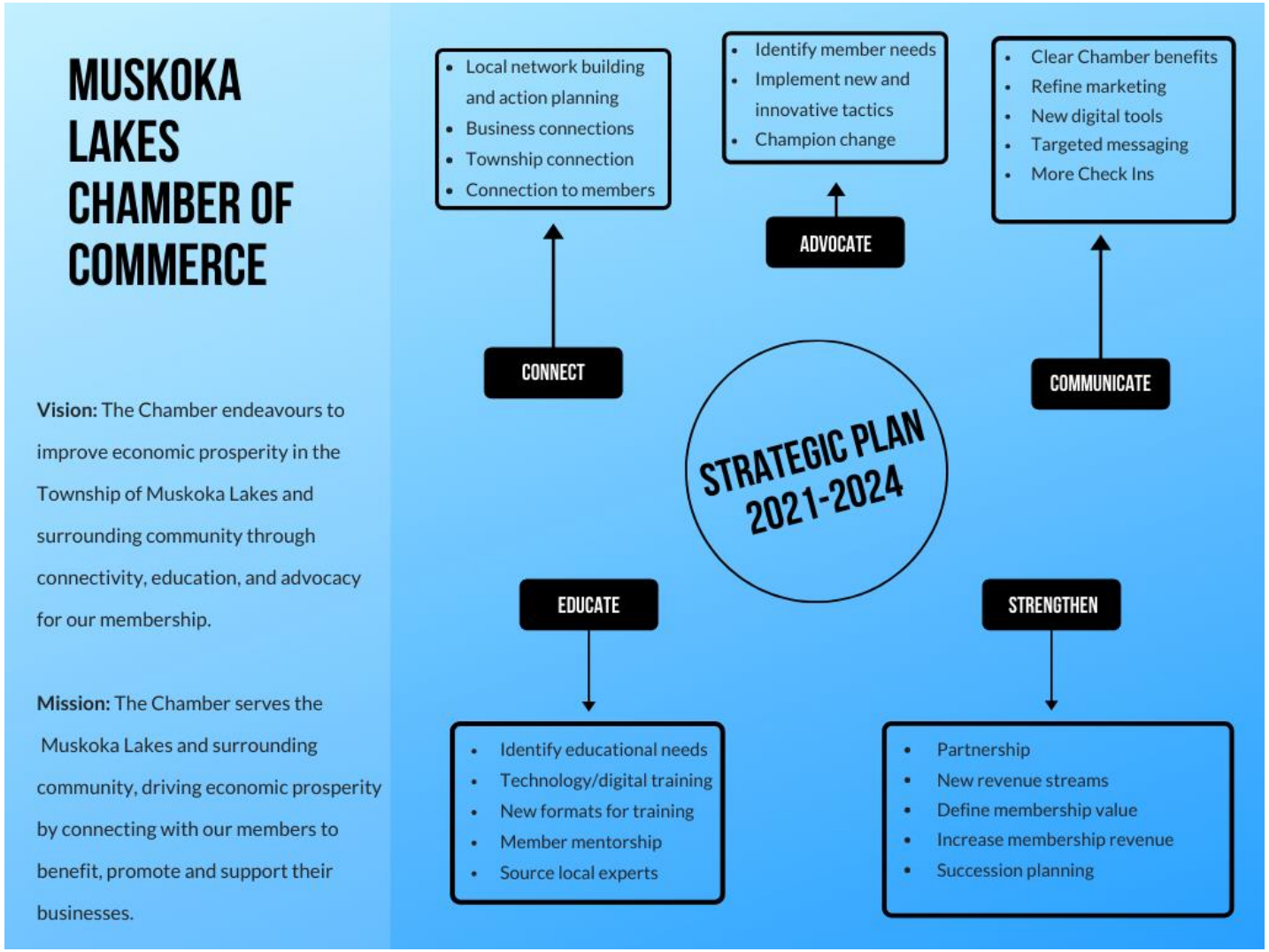
  ✓ Helps to direct decision-making

  ✓ Identifies goals to achieve through an action plan

  ✓ A living document that is renewed when goals are achieved

A Strategic Plan…

- Is a formally written document that **guides a group's decision-making process toward achieving desired goals**
- **Helps in allocating resources** and **prioritizing actions.**
- Is **referred to for operational decisions** and updated.



Key Reasons for a Strategic Plan

Supports self-determination and community ownership

A strategic plan helps a community move from responding to other people's priorities to actively pursuing its own.

Connecting economic development to community priorities

Economic development is most meaningful when it contributes to the community's broader vision of prosperity.

Helps communities navigate funding opportunities

Rather than asking, "What can we get funding for?", start with, "What do we want to accomplish, and how can we fund it?"

Keeps continuity beyond leadership and staff changes

A strategic plan can help maintain momentum while still allowing new leadership to shape the future.

Asserts the community's position when working with industry and external partners

Having a plan doesn't mean saying yes to every opportunity. It helps a community make informed decisions about which opportunities are right for it.

Protects land, culture and future generations

A successful economic development strategy considers not only what the community can gain today, but also what it wants to preserve and pass on to future generations.

Makes the most of limited capacity and resources

A strategic plan doesn't create more resources, but it helps communities decide where their resources can have the greatest impact.

Other Benefits to a Strategic Plan



Establish a **shared vision, mission and goals.**



Establish **clear, realistic goals and objectives** that match the group's mission and vision



Clarify or redefine your **group's role** and your target group(s)



Help board, staff and volunteers have **a shared understanding and common language**



Gain commitment and bring your group together to work on **common goals**



Effectively **communicate your focus and needs** with various stakeholders

Ontario

Activity: The Funding Opportunity Trap

Imagine you're the economic development officer for a northern Indigenous community. Your community has limited staff capacity, a tight budget and several priorities competing for attention. This morning, three potential funding opportunities land on your desk.

You can only realistically advance one right now.

Opportunity A: Small Business Development

Funding to support local entrepreneurs, business training and the launch or expansion of community-owned businesses.

- Potential outcomes: local jobs, entrepreneurship and business revenue.

Opportunity B: Community Infrastructure

Funding to improve a community facility that could support business activity, training and community gatherings.

- Potential outcomes: improved services, new activities and greater community capacity.

Opportunity C: Workforce Development

Funding to deliver skills training that connects community members with employment and emerging economic opportunities.

Potential outcomes: skills development, employment pathways and stronger local workforce participation.

The Missing Piece...

Your community's existing strategic plan identifies three priorities:

- Increasing locally owned businesses and retaining more economic benefits in the community.
- Creating meaningful employment pathways for youth.
- Strengthening community infrastructure to support long-term economic development.

Your team has capacity to advance only one project this quarter.

Debrief:

Here are the key lessons to draw out:

- Funding availability isn't the same as strategic fit. A grant can look attractive without being the right priority.
- A plan helps explain the “why.” It connects individual projects to a larger community vision.
- Prioritization matters. Communities cannot pursue every opportunity at once, particularly when staff and resources are limited.
- Projects can complement each other. Infrastructure, business development and workforce initiatives may reinforce one another over time.
- A plan should guide action, not restrict it. New opportunities can prompt a review of priorities rather than an automatic yes or no.



Upcoming strategic planning training

Looking to strengthen your community's strategic planning process?

Join us for an upcoming Strategic Planning Training series and explore practical tools and resources to help support effective planning in your community.

Series dates:

- Thursday, February 18, 2027
- Thursday, February 25, 2027
- Thursday, March 4, 2027
- Thursday, March 11, 2027

Register now

Overview

The Rural Ontario Development (ROD) program replaces the Rural Economic Development (RED) program.

The ROD program supports the objectives of Enabling Opportunity: Ontario's Rural Economic Development Strategy.

The ROD program provides cost-share funding for projects that help rural communities.

Next Intake: January 18th 2027 – February 25th, 2027



ROD Program Funding Overview

Streams	Economic Diversification, Competitiveness, and Capacity Building	Workforce Development, Attraction and Retention	Community Infrastructure Enhancements	Business Development
Audience	Municipalities, Not-for-Profit organizations, Indigenous communities and non-profit organizations and Local Services Boards			Small businesses in Rural Ontario
Description	Projects that support communities to build economic development capacity and implement strategies that increase competitiveness to retain businesses, attract investment and enhance growth	Projects that support communities to implement strategies and/or to undertake initiatives for attracting and retaining workers	Projects that update or transform community assets that have been identified as important to the community's economy	Projects to support small businesses to be economically sustainable, competitive and diversify their markets
Sub-streams and provincial cost-share	• Economic Diversification and Competitiveness – 50% cost-share up to $150,000 • Strategies & Plans - 50% cost-share up to $50,000 • Capacity Building Events – 35% cost-share up to $10,000	• 50% and cost-share up to $150,000	• Rehabilitation of cultural, heritage or tourism attractions • Redevelopment of vacant and/or underutilized buildings • Enhancing downtown public spaces • 35% cost share up to $250,000	• Market Development • Enhancing Cyber Security • Succession Planning • Accessibility Improvements • 35% cost share up to $10,000
Assessment process	• Projects are selected using a competitive merit-based process • Small Projects that request provincial funding of up to $25,000 have a streamlined application and assessment process.			• Eligibility



Strategies and Plans Sub-Stream

Description

Projects will develop strategies or plans that will enhance the ability of the community to engage in Economic Development activities.

Maximum Provincial Cost Share
50%

Maximum Provincial Funding
$50,000

Project Type:

- Strategies and plans

Example Projects:

- Economic Development strategy
- Housing plans for attracting and retaining workers
- Feasibility or Business Plans
- Community Improvement Plans



Economic Diversification and Competitiveness Sub-Stream

Description:

Projects in this sub-stream must implement an existing plan or strategy.

Maximum Provincial Cost Share
50%

Maximum Provincial Funding
$150,000

Project Types:

- Business Retention & Expansion
- Downtown Revitalization
- Entrepreneurship or Business Succession
- Regional Marketing or Outreach
- Technology Adoption / Innovation Initiatives

Our Programs and Services

- Agricultural Economic Development resources
- **Community Economic Development 101**
- Community Immigrant Retention in Rural Ontario
- Downtown Revitalization program
- Economic Analysis Data Tool
- First Impressions Community Exchange program
- Performance Measurement Resources
- **Strategic Planning Training & Resource Guide**
- **Effective Funding Proposals**
- Business Retention and Expansion program

Rural Economic Development Digest

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