

CASE STUDY

Nonprofit Dreams Big, Creates New Mission, and Staff Gains a Voice

About the Maryland Science Center

The Maryland Academy of Sciences, commonly known as the Maryland Science Center, is Maryland's oldest scientific institution, and one of the oldest in the entire nation. Believing that science forms a foundation for lifelong learning and curiosity, the Maryland Science Center fosters a love of science through unique programs and hands-on experiences that lead to a shared sense of discovery.

The Problem

When Mark Potter became president and CEO of the Maryland Science Center, one of his top priorities was to develop a strategic plan for the nonprofit organization. While there was a one-page plan already in place, it wasn't enough to carry the organization forward into the next five years.

Getting the Strategic Planning Process Started

The Maryland Science Center's board of trustees approved Mark's request to go through a strategic planning process. The board formed an

ad hoc committee to lead the initiative. The Maryland Science Center's leadership team knew they needed to hire a strategic planning facilitator and turned to Gross Mendelsohn, the organization's CPA firm. [Richard Wolf](#), one of our facilitators, was hired to lead the strategic planning process.

What Problems Did the Strategic Planning Session Need to Solve?

The organization needed a clear, action-oriented plan to take it forward into the next five years. The recession was hard on the Science Center, as it was on many nonprofits. Once they turned that corner, the Maryland Science Center's senior staff knew the organization needed to look down the road and dream a little bigger.

While the recession was partly to blame, not all staff members fully understood the how's and why's behind the organization. One of the organization's aims, in addition to coming away with a five-year plan, was to engage the staff in the strategic planning process so they better understood the organization.

Who Participated?

About 25 people from the Maryland Science Center's board, Scientific and Educational Council, and leadership team participated in the strategic planning process. Staff members from a wide cross section of the organization, including operations, finance, marketing, education, guest services and technology, were present.

The Facilitator's Challenges

Our facilitator, Richard Wolf, faced several challenges. He had only one day to facilitate a large group of 25 people through a structured process. He had to keep the process on track while still giving all participants a voice and allowing for worthwhile tangents.

Expecting the Unexpected

Even the most productive strategic planning sessions almost always come with a surprise or two. This session was no different. When Richard asked for feedback on the organization's mission statement, their reaction was, to put it mildly, less than enthusiastic. Richard essentially heard a collective "meh" from the participants.

The organization's existing mission statement did nothing to inspire the staff, whose job it was to inspire people to get excited about science. The old mission statement struck such a chord with participants that the Maryland Science

Center's leadership team and the board of trustees decided to invest in a separate session just to explore a new mission statement. Richard encouraged participants to dream bigger, and eventually a new mission statement surfaced after some passionate discussion: *We are the Maryland Science Center. We inspire. We empower. We engage. Let's science!*

The Outcomes

Aside from the strategic plan itself and an accompanying list of practical action items, the Science Center gained quite a few things as a result of the strategic planning process. Perhaps most important, the organization's staff gained a voice. The organization's leadership was deliberately hands off during the strategic planning session, allowing staff members to take ownership of the process. Asking for the staff's input on the current state and future of the Science Center created a sense of transparency and investment across departments. Just as important, the staff has more direction than ever before. They are clear on the organization's goals and, more importantly, they know exactly what they need to do to move ahead. The leadership team at the Science Center was quick to achieve some quick wins after the strategic plan was completed.

Need Help?

Contact us [here](#) or call 800.899.4623 for help.