



Realizing the Vision: Fort Lauderdale's Strategy Journey

To activate its ambitious, community-driven vision plan, the City of Fort Lauderdale embarked on a sweeping new program of strategy management. In the process, the city embraced performance measurement with equal parts discipline, dedication, and passion.

Strategic planning is not the norm among cities. But in Fort Lauderdale, it's been the big focus since mid-2011, when City Manager Lee Feldman arrived. Feldman and his team (including two new assistant city managers) have been bringing the same brand of professionalism to strategy management to their city that is in place at the most strategy-focused private-sector organizations.

It's all part of a move toward greater responsiveness, transparency, and accountability that many cities talk about, but few are actually achieving. Although the effort is still in building mode, the dedication and

discipline the city's management team has shown thus far is impressive. Equally impressive is the degree of integration Fort Lauderdale is pursuing to realize its vision of being "the city you never want to leave."

Just two years ago, this city of 169,000 was reeling from the effects of the recession. Known as a coastal mecca for the wealthy, the city was experiencing a wave of foreclosures along with a shrinking tax base. The city needed to cut costs in a sustainable way—balancing strategic cuts with strategic investments—and to assess community priorities. Through a reorganization, it cut the number of departments from 15 to 9. Within one year, 212 employees (out of 2,509) left; 81 of those positions were eliminated through an early retirement incentive program.

Beyond injecting fiscal discipline into city management, the new administration was charged with carrying out the vision planning process under way since 2010, one year before the city's centennial. The new team would complete the visioning plan effort and build a management mechanism to execute it. Among other things, this meant developing the city's first-ever strategic plan. Feldman created the Office of Structural Innovation to oversee the effort, as well as to manage strategy and process improvement on an ongoing basis. Former functions were redesigned and aligned through the Manager's Offices of Structural Innovation, Budget, Public Affairs, and Neighbor Support. Internal auditor positions were given a new focus: performance analysis.



ClearPoint helps communities translate strategy into action by managing strategy review meetings, automating performance management dashboards, and tracking key projects. By coordinating all the little tasks you need to keep track of, ClearPoint makes it easy to manage strategy.

DEVELOPING THE VISION PLAN

The vision plan, two-and-a-half years in the making, was systematically developed through extensive community outreach: interviews, open houses, telephone town halls with the mayor and commissioners, and a social website. The city gathered residents' ideas about the future of Fort Lauderdale over the next 25 years. Ideas ran the gamut, from transportation and infrastructure to culture and public safety to innovation and economic development.

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The city began the painstaking process of organizing and analyzing the voluminous feedback, classifying ideas in groups and subgroups, as well as by degree of consensus and priority. It identified three broad categories of ideas:

>> **Sustainable Development:** which includes "connected development" (such as linking homes and employment centers with transportation options, and ensuring that streets consider all uses (transit, parking, pedestrians); sustainability (for example, environment, waterway cleanliness, and climate change and rising sea levels); and infrastructure (such as roads, street lights, and drainage);

>> **Quality of Life:** culture and public spaces, healthy communities, neighborhoods, and safety; and

>> **Prosperity:** economic development, innovation, education, technology; governance and services.

These ideas became the basis for Fort Lauderdale's Vision Scorecard. The formal vision plan, "Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale," was adopted unanimously in April 2013 by the appointed Community Visioning Committee as well as by the city commission.

EARLY CHALLENGES: INTEGRATE AND ALIGN

Grouping these ideas highlighted the interdependencies between individual areas as well as between the broader categories. Leaders saw the relationships between, for example, maintaining the environment and waterway

cleanliness (in "sustainability") as well as between improving mass transit and economic development, or safety and governance and services. They soon realized that managing toward these goals in the traditional departmental (and siloed) fashion would not work.

Achieving the vision would, in fact, require a cross-functional approach. Each department depended on others to fulfill process improvements or complete initiatives that were necessary for achieving its own objectives. Such alignment required a disciplined performance management approach and a robust performance monitoring system to support it. Apart from connecting the vision and strategic plans, the system had to also help connect supporting plans and tools—specifically, the commission's annual action plan, the annual budget, the five-year community investment plan, departmental scorecards, and departmental plans.

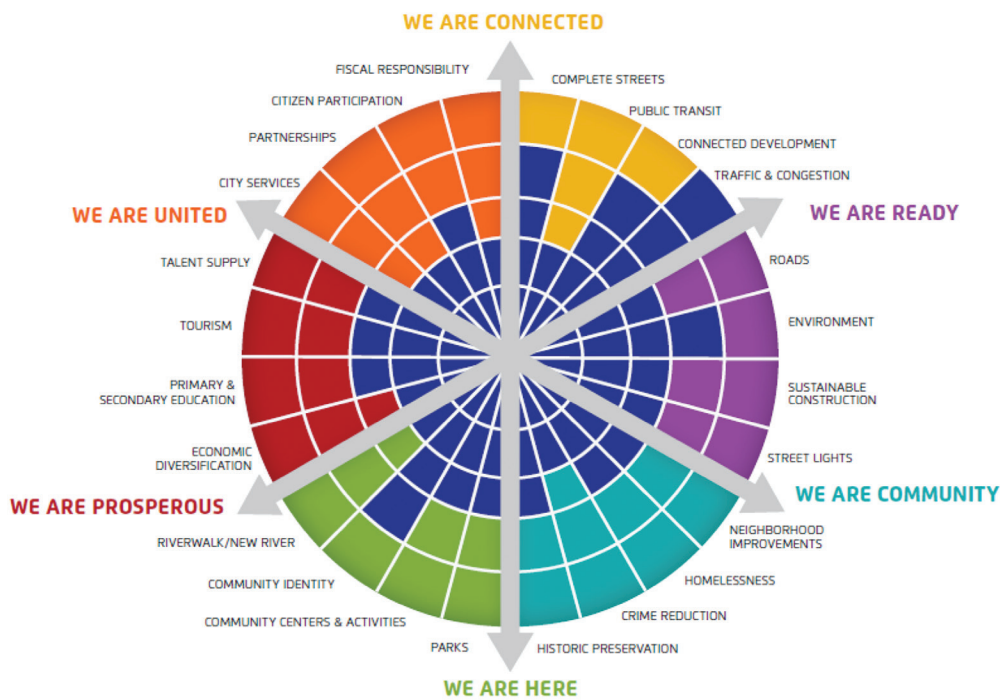
As ambitious as the vision was, strategy and budget would also have to be aligned to keep processes and costs streamlined. Finally, the city's cross-functional approach called for an unprecedented degree of transparency, both internal and external. Departments needed to know how other departments were progressing, and city leaders owed it to their constituents—who have as much, if not more, at stake in the city's vision—to be able to report regularly and accurately on progress.

ADVANCING FROM VISION PLAN TO STRATEGIC PLAN

To translate vision to strategy, Fort Lauderdale defined six cross-functional strategic areas ("Cylinders of Excellence"): infrastructure, neighborhood enhancement, public places, business development, and public safety, plus the city's internal support platform.

The strategic plan, in development since 2012, is scheduled to launch in October 2013. Employee teams are working together to create objectives and draft performance indicators. They are also assessing and prioritizing initiatives, recommending that those that no longer serve the strategy be abandoned and new ones defined by the vision plan are added. Some three dozen neighborhood and community advisory boards will provide feedback to city managers on specific subject-areas, such as marine issues or roads.

Meanwhile, managers are busy aligning.



VISION SCORECARD

After organizing and analyzing feedback, the City of Fort Lauderdale classified ideas into three broad categories: sustainable development, quality of life, and prosperity. These became the basis for Fort Lauderdale's Vision Scorecard, shown left.

As identified goals in each area are accomplished, a segment turns dark blue, giving a visual representation of progress towards the overall vision.

For example, "connected development" involves planning transportation, as well as creating a pedestrian-friendly city and practicing wise land use. All of these goals contribute to economic development—one reason that the city created its new Department of Transportation and Mobility. The long-planned Wave streetcar system involves multiple strategic objectives and operational areas: trolley stops must be ADA-compliant, physically connected, and well-branded. The initiative "Activate the Riverwalk" involves multiple initiatives handled by different departments: from lighting and seawall issues to implementing a master plan for the scenic walk.

by Feldman from Miami-Dade County, where she played a role in that county's well-regarded strategy management efforts. "Aligning a preliminary strategic plan with developing the vision plan has to be iterative," she adds. "We update as we go, but we're also being very systematic about it, making sure that community priorities are reflected."

MEASURING AND MONITORING PERFORMANCE

Developing performance indicators is a challenge, Knowles concedes. "Since the city is new to the concept of performance management, there's not a lot of trend data available, and it's hard to find indicators for success." On top of that, she notes, it can be difficult to set reasonable targets without baselines. Fort Lauderdale is focusing on selecting indicators that will drive behavior. The city uses a blend of International City/County Management Association (ICMA) benchmarks and staff-developed performance indicators that demonstrate achievement of strategic objectives. Before the strategic plan is finalized, people are zeroing in on a select number of indicators that are meaningful for the vision plan, the strategic plan, the budget, and departmental scorecards. Ideally, these indicators would work both in the short term, to guide decision-making, and in the long term, to reflect progress toward the vision.

To monitor performance against the plans, Fort Lauderdale adopted the ClearPoint system, which served the city's need to facilitate data input, reporting capabilities, and visibility in a way that supports the city's cross-functional approach.

Departmental teams must therefore work in concert so that their objectives, measures, and initiatives are in synch. Cross-functional teams are also meeting regularly to address issues, solve problems, and discuss how to implement initiatives.

"There are many moving parts" concedes Amy Knowles, assistant to the city manager for Structural Innovation. Knowles is one of the new managerial talents recruited

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capabilities, and visibility in a way that supports the city's cross-functional approach. The planning team created icons for the strategic plan's Cylinders of Excellence; these icons appear in the software to help reinforce the connection among the strategic cylinders, objectives, measures, and initiatives. The next steps are to develop the vision plan scorecard within ClearPoint, and post these performance metrics on its public website.

The software also supports Fort Lauderdale's PerformanceSTAT model of performance review meetings (based on the CitiSTAT model developed by Baltimore in 2000), which it has branded FL²STAT (for Fort Lauderdale, FL). These monthly data-driven meetings for department heads help ensure accountability and adherence to the plan. Because data can be displayed in numerous and new ways, departments have been able to streamline reporting outputs, thus expanding their capacity for more constructive (read: strategic) work. Progress with the commission's action plan initiatives, for example, is monitored and reported from ClearPoint, eliminating the need for any duplicate reporting to elected officials.

LINKING STRATEGY AND BUDGET

With a preliminary strategic plan in hand, the city recently began integrating the budget process with strategy execution, using both ClearPoint and FL²STAT. The visual relationships shown in the software help communicate the process and steps to internal teams as well as to the city's advisory boards and the community.

Because many goals will require funding beyond tax revenues—from grants and public/private partnerships, for instance—reliable, clear, and easy-to-access data is critical. For the first time, Fort Lauderdale is able to use data to indicate its strategic priorities as it prepares budgeting requests. Departments can more easily get support for funding requests from the city's budget team. The Office of Neighbor Support can use data to solicit volunteer experts to help implement strategic initiatives.

Each department will present to a budget advisory board and the city commission when it makes funding requests, showing goals and performance indicators. In this way, departments can demonstrate how funding will drive their performance and its impact on the overall vision. The performance management software is thus playing a vital role in forging trust and demonstrating the administration's accountability.

EARLY ON, BIG GAINS

Although still in the implementation stages of its strategic journey, it's fair to say Fort Lauderdale has already achieved a measure of success. Going from vision to strategy and then to devising the plans and systems to carry the two out can be a long and difficult process for any organization. Shifting from a siloed to a cross-functional approach—in mind-set and actions—is equally daunting. And for a city government, where leadership changes every few years and leaders must answer to a diverse and demanding public, making such strides as quickly as Fort Lauderdale has is remarkable.

Fort Lauderdale already has a lot to show for its efforts. It is heading into budget season with a budget that is not only balanced, but that is also integrated with the goals of the commission and the community. Citizen satisfaction is up. And in June, the city won the National Civic League's All-America City Diversity and Inclusiveness Award. The award recognizes Fort Lauderdale for its community-based problem solving and civic engagement efforts involving the public, private, and nonprofit sectors—in particular its extensive outreach for the visioning initiative. As City Manager Feldman observes, "It's an exciting time in Fort Lauderdale. Along with our beautiful beaches, we have a vibrant downtown, engaged neighbors, and positive economic indicators. Through the community vision process, we've articulated a powerful direction for the next 22 years. And our strategy management system outlines the steps to get us there—together."



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