

Strategic Planning Readiness and Implementation Checklist

A practical resource for organisations commissioning, refreshing or approving a strategic plan or programme design in Ethiopia and similar development contexts.

Use this checklist to test whether a planning process has enough evidence, clear strategic choices, implementation ownership and review mechanisms to produce a strategy that can actually be used.

Use it when you are:

- preparing a TOR or RFQ for strategic planning
- reviewing whether an existing strategy needs a full refresh or a targeted update
- validating a draft strategic plan before approval
- moving from strategy approval into annual planning and implementation
- checking whether a programme design has a usable theory of change, results framework and review process

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Start with the decisions the strategy must guide.

A strategy becomes weak when the process begins with activities or workshop agendas before clarifying the mandate, evidence and choices. These checks help establish a defensible planning foundation.

A. Mandate and decision ownership

Confirm who owns the planning process and what the strategy must resolve.

- The planning period, mandate and approval authority are explicit.
- The organisation has identified the decisions the strategy must guide, not only the document it wants produced.
- Leadership, staff and key stakeholders understand their roles in consultation, choice-making, validation and approval.
- The process has a realistic timetable for evidence review, consultation, drafting, challenge and validation.

B. Evidence base and context

Use evidence to identify what has changed and what requires a strategic response.

- Performance against the previous strategy or current plan has been reviewed.
- Internal capacity, governance, partnerships, financing and operating systems have been considered.
- Relevant external trends, policy changes, risks, opportunities and stakeholder expectations are documented.
- Evidence gaps and uncertainties are visible rather than treated as facts.
- Stakeholder consultation is designed to inform choices, not simply confirm an already-written plan.

C. Strategic choices and trade-offs

A strategy should prioritise. If everything is a priority, the document is unlikely to guide decisions.

- The proposed priorities are few enough to influence resource allocation and management attention.
- The organisation has explicitly considered what it will stop, reduce, defer or do differently.
- Priorities are consistent with mandate, comparative advantage and plausible resources.
- Major assumptions, dependencies and risks are recorded alongside the choices they affect.

Make the strategy governable, implementable and reviewable.

Approval is not the end of strategic planning. The strongest plans connect priorities to results, ownership, resources and a review cycle that allows leadership to respond when assumptions change.

D. Theory of change and measurable results

Show how the strategic choices are expected to produce results.

- Each strategic priority has a clear result pathway rather than only a list of activities.
- Outcomes and indicators are specific enough to support management review.
- Baselines, targets or a practical plan for establishing them are defined where appropriate.
- Cross-cutting commitments such as inclusion, safeguarding, sustainability or conflict sensitivity are integrated into the logic where relevant.

E. Implementation architecture

Translate the strategy into responsibilities and practical execution arrangements.

- Responsibilities for each priority are assigned to identifiable functions or decision owners.
- Sequencing, milestones and key dependencies are visible.
- Financial, staffing, partnership and systems implications have been considered.
- Annual planning and budgeting can be traced back to the strategic priorities.
- Governance bodies know what they will review and what decisions they are expected to make.

F. Monitoring, learning and adaptation

Build in a review mechanism so the plan remains useful when conditions change.

- A manageable monitoring framework identifies indicators, data sources, responsibilities and review frequency.
- Leadership has agreed how implementation performance will be reviewed and documented.
- The strategy identifies triggers or processes for adaptation when risks, resources or assumptions change.
- The final document is accompanied by the implementation tools needed for use - not only a narrative plan.

Define the assignment before requesting proposals.

Complete this page internally before issuing a TOR/RFQ or discussing the scope with a consultant. Short, clear answers usually produce more comparable proposals and a more focused planning process.

Planning purpose	What decision, transition or organisational need is driving the strategic-planning process?
Planning period	What dates or years should the strategy cover?
Decision owners	Who will sponsor, validate and formally approve the strategy?
Evidence available	Previous strategy, evaluations, performance data, policies, financial information, assessments, stakeholder studies, etc.
Stakeholders	Which groups must be consulted, and which have decision-making rather than consultation roles?
Expected scope	Situation analysis, institutional assessment, theory of change, strategic priorities, implementation plan, MEL framework, costing, risk analysis, workshops, etc.
Required outputs	What exact documents, tools, presentations or facilitation outputs are required?
Implementation link	How should the final strategy connect to annual plans, budgets, governance reviews and staff responsibilities?
Constraints	Timing, security/access, languages, stakeholder availability, data gaps, approval deadlines or budget limitations.
Success test	Six months after approval, what would show that the strategy is being used rather than stored?

This checklist is a scoping aid, not a substitute for context-specific professional judgement. The final approach should be tailored to the organisation, mandate and decision environment.