

Strategic Planning at the Namibia Nature Foundation

The organisation

The Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) is one of the biggest non-governmental conservation organisations in Namibia, contributing to a wide range of conservation programmes through its network of technical specialists and core expertise in financial management and project co-ordination.

The need

The environment in which the NNF was operating in was undergoing major change. The relationship between NGOs and government in Namibia was under strain and the attention of the development sector turning from such challenges as HIV and AIDS to mitigating the effects of climate change. Donors were pulling out of so-called 'middle income' countries and Namibia faced a major reduction in international funding as attention was focused on the more politically and economically fragile areas of the world.

As the NNF had grown, internal barriers such as geographical distance, a tendency for different parts of the organisation to work in silos, and differences of perception related to the diversity of employees, worked against effective employee engagement and participation in the longer term future of the organisation. The appointment of a new Director led to a review of the ways in which the NNF operated and the areas in which it worked. Changes were put in place to enable the NNF to become more commercially astute, raise standards of operation, and build new expertise. The NNF also wanted support to:

- Identify and communicate its longer term aims through the development of a strategic plan
- Provide all employees with a clear line of sight between their daily activities and NNF's vision and mission
- Identify and prioritise key organisational development activities
- Create an implementation plan that will inform the annual planning process
- Engage employees, board members and external stakeholders
- Acquire the necessary skills and confidence to review and develop strategic plans in the future.

What we did

The Namibia Nature Foundation had a key partnership with VSO Namibia through which Jacqueline was able to carry out the work as a VSO volunteer. The following objectives were agreed:

- Assist the NNF Director and Office and Personnel Manager to design a process for drafting a Strategic Plan as a central part of developing the organisation
- Coach NNF staff in the process and facilitation skills required for strategy development
- Facilitate the involvement of all NNF staff members into the process to increase ownership and engagement
- Continuously monitor organisational capacity and make recommendations for this in line with any strategic outcomes
- Where possible, remotely support the ongoing development of an Implementation Plans post-placement and provide assistance on ongoing organizational and strategic issues.

Jacqueline's work with the NNF started before her first visit via email and Skype with Director, Julian Fennessy. They explored the preliminary work that the NNF had already carried out and agreed the models and processes that would form the basis of their work together. This meant that the work could start on the day of Jacqueline's arrival. Jacqueline explained her role at a staff meeting and arranged one-to-one interviews with head office and regionally based staff. In the interviews, Jacqueline explained the rationale and process for the strategic plan, the contribution staff could make to its development and elicited information that she then collated to develop an outline strategic plan and propose initial strategic goals. The interviews also highlighted a number of areas for organisational, team and individual development, which Jacqueline captured in a baseline report.

Jacqueline helped the NNF to develop terms of reference for and establish a strategic planning steering group of staff representing different functions and geographic locations. After Jacqueline's first visit, based at the NNF offices in Windhoek over the course of 4 weeks, the steering group took the draft strategic plan to the next stage, with remote support, embedding the sense of engagement and ownership within the organisation.

Jacqueline returned to Namibia two months later to support the NNF in finalising the strategic plan. This included supporting the Director at a board meeting and gaining board agreement for an external stakeholder survey. Jacqueline then went on to design and run the survey to:

- Elicit external stakeholder views and needs
- Test internal assumptions
- Assess the NNF's performance and adherence to its values based on external stakeholders' experience of the organisation.

The main deliverable was a report of the survey's findings to inform strategic and operational priorities and support decision making by the board.

Jacqueline also worked with a graduate Communications intern to introduce them to the strategic planning process and integrate with internal and external communications work, and ran workshops with the steering group to translate strategic goals and organisational development recommendations into annual work plans, ensuring that the process for on-going review of the strategy was incorporated.

A key message from the pre-work and baseline report was the differences of perception related to the diversity of employees, leading to silo-working and difficulties in relationships between staff and managers. Jacqueline therefore drew on her work in diversity awareness, organisational culture and values to co-design workshops with staff on improving working relationships and identifying the NNF's desired organisational culture. Jacqueline facilitated the workshops and ensured the materials were handed over to the NNF for their own use. The organisational culture workshops also provided the basis for a review of NNF values. Jacqueline delivered a report including workshop outputs, key findings and recommendations, which themselves included models and suggestions for taking this forward e.g. on building trust and giving and receiving feedback.

Benefits

The outputs of the NNF's work with Jacqueline work included:

- A strategic plan ready for board approval prior to public launch
- Links between the strategic goals and implementation activities that will form the basis of annual work planning over the coming 3 years
- A baseline report against which to measure strategic plan and annual work plan implementation progress
- An established strategic planning steering group that will develop into an annual work plan steering group in November/December
- A set of NNF values tested against the desired NNF culture and supporting the mission and vision
- Reports and associated recommendations on the NNF's organisational culture
- A 36% response rate to the external stakeholder survey, leading to an insightful report providing further input to the communications work stream.

“The strategic planning has been embedded in our annual NNF work plan and on-going monitoring by the team together. The strategic planning helped to guide our HR consultant and her work which has enabled NNF to better understand many aspects of its HR. The first round of reviews is on-going for staff and helping both employees and employer look at their impacts and outputs; these will then be the backbone for any performance increases – a nice, neat consolidated approach involving and engaging all staff.”

Comments from the Namibia Nature Foundation

“It was a pleasure to have Jacqueline support NNF and its work and we thank VSO for the opportunity. Her high levels of energy and enthusiasm were always well received and supportive. In short, the following words sum up her work and commitment: reliable, professional, technically able, positive, and culturally sensitive. Thank you!”

Julian Fennessy Director

Julian also rated Jacqueline's work as 'excellent' across the ten skills, abilities and personality traits against which VSO measures its placements.