



U.S. EMBASSY KABUL

**AFGHAN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT  
GRANTS PROGRAM**

**Guidebook  
for  
Grant Applicants**

# Overview

The Afghan Women’s Empowerment (AWE) Grants Program is a United States Government initiative, launched in 2009, designed to fund worthy projects that promote women's advancement in Afghanistan. AWE grants are intended for civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations and universities. Funding is available for Afghan-led projects that increase women’s participation in political life. The guidebook you are now reading is intended to provide you and your organization with information on the following: the strategic planning process, including some exercises that will help you decide whether you should consider applying for an AWE grant; organizational development; financial management; and funding sources and financial sustainability. The final section will provide you with guidance on applying for a grant.

By the time you finish reading this, you should be able to do the following:

- Write a Mission Statement for your organization.....**pages 2-7**
- Understand the importance of good organizational development and financial management.....**pages 8-11**
- Access information on funding sources and financial sustainability.....**pages 12-13**
- Understand the goals and objectives of the AWE Grant Program and whether an AWE Grant is right for you.....**pages 14-16**

# Strategic Planning Process

Every organization, no matter how large or how small, has an identity and a reason for existing. This is true for government agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This guidebook will focus on NGOs.

Before we go any further, it is useful for you to understand what we mean by strategic planning.

## Definition of Strategic Planning:

**The strategic planning process** is an organized effort to make strategic decisions about an NGO's identity and reason for existence. It is also a set of principles, steps, and tools designed to help leaders, managers, and planners think and act in a strategic fashion. This process, then, will help the NGO make effective decisions to achieve its mission and to satisfy its target audience by taking into consideration its strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats that exist in its external environment.

In other words, **strategic planning** is a process of analysis, which provides a creative, innovative, and deep look into an NGO's character and culture to assist the NGO as it searches for new ideas and builds its future. But why is this process so important?

## Importance of Strategic Planning for NGOs:

**EXERCISE 1:** Take a few minutes to think of a few reasons why your organization might need such a process, and list them in the spaces below.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**The following are some additional reasons for you to consider:**

- ◆ Strategic planning helps identify the main direction toward which an NGO should focus its efforts and activities;
- ◆ Strategic planning develops the rationale for an organization's existence, enabling an NGO to identify the major goals and objectives it wishes to achieve;
- ◆ Strategic planning improves the quality of decisions made by an NGO as it focuses attention towards the critical challenges facing the organization;
- ◆ Strategic planning helps decision makers identify the appropriate measures and actions to deal with these issues; and
- ◆ Strategic planning helps enlarge the NGO's internal and external constituencies, thereby increases its feeling of security and trust.

All of these reasons are important, because taken together they help enhance the legitimacy of the organization. This legitimacy, in turn, increases the support an NGO will receive from its partners. Additionally, it provides those in charge with a clear organizational ideology.

Everyone involved in an NGO – from its working staff members to its leaders – will be able to perform their roles more effectively if they have a common vision of the organization. This vision includes a set of strategies, ideally developed together by the members of the NGO. This common understanding allows the NGO to respond effectively and efficiently to both internal and external needs and demands.

Strategic planning also helps an NGO assess any potential risks and opportunities that may arise. This assessment involves identifying an organization's strengths and weaknesses. It then provides a systematic way for that organization to address the opportunities or threats it might face.

Finally, strategic planning helps NGOs make the best use of available resources. A successful strategic planning process is based on an accurate estimation of an NGO's capabilities, resources, and environment, helping it make the best decisions possible.

Now that you have a better idea of what the strategic planning process is, let's take a look at how it works...

## The Strategic Framework

To be effective, every NGO should be able to define for itself two important aspects:

1. Mission Statement
2. Strategic Vision

So, let's take a look at each of these points in order.

### What is a Mission Statement?

A **mission statement** provides the moral framework and set of values that distinguish one NGO from another. It clearly identifies the types of activities and programs delivered by the NGO and all the services which that organization provides. The mission statement also identifies the main targets or clients to receive these services.

Developing your own mission statement requires answering questions about your NGO.

**Exercise 2:** Take a moment to answer the following questions about your organization.

(1) What do we want to achieve? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(2) To whom should we direct our programs and services/ who are our clients? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(3) How are we different from other NGOs working in our field? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(4) Why is our work necessary? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Keep your answers, as you will need them to draft your mission statement.

## Example of an NGO Mission Statement

Typically, you can find mission statements for organizations in their brochures or on their websites. Before writing your own mission statement, let's take a look at one that already exists.

The following is the mission statement for the Egyptian NGO Service Center (ENGOSC):

- ◆ ENGOSC is a civil organization whose mission it is to work with non-governmental organizations in Egypt to strengthen their managerial, technical, and financial capacities and to help them perform an effective role as full partners with government and the private sector in socio-economic development.
  
- ◆ To achieve this mission, the Center shall:
  - Enhance the capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) to present themselves to and communicate with donor agencies and successfully access funding opportunities;
  - Mobilize new grant funding for civil society and develop effective new approaches to community resource mobilization, including human resources, and income generation by CSOs.
  - Increase civil society demand for organizational development assistance and then deliver technical assistance, training and consultative support to CSOs using both our own professional staff and our associated Training of Trainer graduates, CSO mentoring associations, and other training organization networks.
  - Stimulate civil society to greater civic action and advocacy on behalf of citizens and constituencies, and facilitate linkages with civil societies in other nations.
  - Improve civil society access to, and greater use of, information and knowledge for more effective practice of civic action and local development.

**Exercise 3:** Now it's your turn. On a separate piece of paper, try drafting your own mission statement using the answers to the questions on the previous page. Make sure to describe as clearly and accurately as possible what it is your organization does, to whom it will be providing these services, how your NGO is different than all others operating in the field, and why this work is so important.

## What is a Strategic Vision?

As you might have guessed, strategic vision has to do with how an NGO sees itself both now and in the future. It is a framework for justifying an NGO's existence. With respect to strategic planning, vision can be defined as follows:

**Strategic vision** is an overall view and perspective of the NGO's desired future. It includes the future aspirations and hopes that an NGO presently cannot achieve with its current resources, yet is possible to achieve in the long term. Vision is thus a realistic dream of how the organization will look by the end of the strategic plan.

**Exercise 4:** Take a few minutes to write the vision of your organization. Think about what precisely your NGO would like to accomplish if it had all the means available to do so. This is just an exercise, so don't be afraid to dream!

My NGO's vision is

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## Analyzing Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Before an NGO can move forward toward realizing its strategic vision, the organization must assess its current position and consider its comparative advantage vis-à-vis others in the field. One way to achieve this is through a “**SWOT**” analysis. SWOT is a process by which an NGO analyzes its internal **Strengths** and **Weaknesses**, while identifying its external **Opportunities** and **Threats**. The elements of a SWOT analysis include the following.

### Strengths:

- ◆ What an NGO does well and/or better than others
- ◆ Resources available to the organization
- ◆ Ability to take advantage of opportunities, while avoiding threats

### Weaknesses:

- ◆ Areas for improvement
- ◆ Resources that are lacking
- ◆ Factors or deficiencies in the internal environment that hinder an NGO’s ability to take advantage of opportunities

### Opportunities:

- ◆ Changes in the external environment that present a chance to improve and/or expand activities to better respond to community needs
- ◆ External situations or trends that might provide a positive impact on the NGO’s field of work

### Threats:

- ◆ External situations, trends, or changes that cause a negative impact on the NGO’s field of work, thereby hindering its ability to make good use of resources
- ◆ Conditions that may result in a collapse of operations if not dealt with appropriately

The NGO’s **external** environment can be defined as everything that exists outside the organization which might affect its performance, such as political, legal, and socio-economic factors. The NGO’s **internal** environment can be defined as everything that exists inside the organization, including both human and financial resources. Since it is unlikely that any organization will be strong in all areas of operation, NGOs should identify their strengths and weaknesses to better position themselves to take advantage of all opportunities that may arise, while developing strategies to minimize the consequences of any external threats. To help achieve these goals, let’s now take a look at the importance of organizational development.

# Organizational Development

**Organizational development** plays a vital role toward ensuring the longevity, sustainability, and capability of any NGO. Yet in the face of pressing demands, organizational development is often not considered as high a priority as it should be. In the long term, however, building organizational capacity can significantly enhance an NGO's performance and sustainability.

## Elements of Organizational Development for NGOs

Organizational development requires a clear understanding of an NGO's capacity, plus the following fundamental aspects of the organization:

- ◆ Whether it uses the financial and human resources available to maintain its viability;
- ◆ Whether it executes activities that match its strategic objectives and are feasible within the limits of its resources; and
- ◆ Whether its legal status corresponds to the activities it undertakes, including whether the NGO is able to receive funding from foreign donors.

The following are some of the actions an organization can take to improve its capacity and performance:

- ◆ Develop a governance structure, including a board of directors, staffing plan, and organizational policies;
- ◆ Train board and staff in management skills and leadership responsibilities;
- ◆ Establish administrative systems and controls to monitor progress, evaluate results, and track expenditures;
- ◆ Train staff in resource development and information systems, including fundraising methods, membership recruitment, database management, information sharing, networking, and grant proposal writing; and
- ◆ Conduct outreach into the community to promote volunteerism and create awareness of the NGO's assets and activities.

Two of the most important elements toward developing a stronger organizational capacity for your NGO include 1) improving financial management capabilities; and 2) establishing a plan for financial sustainability. We will now take a look at how this is done.

# Financial Management

**Financial management** involves elements fundamental to operating a successful organization. These include budgeting, record keeping, financial reporting, and internal control. Let's look briefly at each of these elements.

## Budgeting

Financial management requires preparing accurate budgets to gauge how much money you will need to carry out your work. Establishing a budget helps ensure that your resources are allocated in line with your organization's aims and objectives. The first step in preparing a good budget is to identify exactly what you hope to achieve and how you plan to achieve these goals. List your activities, and then calculate how much they will cost.

Be sure to include costs for personnel, office supplies and other administrative costs, any travel you anticipate, plus the costs of running your activities. These are just your best estimates, and you should be prepared to amend or adjust the budget should you incur unanticipated costs or if your activities happen to change. To help you get started, we have included the outline for a budget at the end of the MEPI Local Grants application found in the Appendices.

A budget is also an important tool to help your organization control its spending. By regularly comparing budgeted costs to actual costs incurred for a project, you will be able to monitor project-related expenses and make any needed adjustments.

## Record Keeping and Financial Reporting

Good financial management requires having appropriate systems in place to record and report accurately on the financial results of a project. Good financial management system should be able to do the following:

- ◆ Record and report current, accurate, and complete financial information;
- ◆ Record and identify the source and use of funds;
- ◆ Ensure effective control over and accountability of funds and other assets;
- ◆ Compare expenses with budgeted amounts for each grant;
- ◆ Maintain accounting records supported by source documentation; and
- ◆ Determine if costs are reasonable, can be properly allocated, and are allowable under the terms and conditions of the grant.

## Keeping Records

The foundation of good accounting is keeping basic records that describe your income (the funds you receive from grants or donations) and expenses (the costs you incur for your activities). These records not only prove that transactions have taken place, but they enable you to determine how much funds you have available for future activities, plus assist you in the budgeting process. It is imperative, then, that you document the details of each transaction -- keeping track of how much you spent, and when and where you spent it -- and that you carefully file and safely store these records. Doing so will not only improve your present financial management, but will also prepare you should your organization face an external audit.

## Financial Reporting

Another element of financial management is writing and reviewing financial reports. These reports can be used both internally, to show the other members of your organization how funds are being spent, and externally, to account for the financial aspects of your activities for your donors. A financial report summarizes your organization's revenue and expenses over a certain period of time and is usually done using a system of codes to allocate transactions to different categories. For NGOs, these categories may be defined by the donor. Preparing accurate, timely financial reports is very important, because these reports will be closely examined by donors and auditors to determine how well you are managing the finances of your organization.

## Internal Control

Internal controls are practices and procedures your organization should follow to ensure that funds and other assets are safeguarded and cannot be misused. For these procedures to be effective, it is essential that all employees of your organization fully understand the purpose and scope of these internal controls. While you should adapt the internal control procedures you use to meet the unique structure and needs of your organization, the following list includes some common control practices that apply to most organizations:

- ◆ Keep cash in a safe place (ideally in a bank account or, at the least, in a secure lock box);
- ◆ Make sure that every expenditure is properly authorized;
- ◆ Adhere to the budget;
- ◆ Monitor expenditures on a regular basis (typically each month);
- ◆ Employ a qualified financial staff (at the least, a well trained accountant);
- ◆ Carry out a "bank reconciliation" each month to ensure that the amount of cash you have in the bank matches the amount shown by your accounting system; and
- ◆ Conduct a professional audit on a regular basis (typically every year).

Internal controls can be built into the organization in several ways. Here are just a few examples.

***Establish and follow control procedures:*** For example, require two signatures to approve payments, and perform regular bank reconciliations to ensure the accuracy of your accounts.

***Assign responsibilities carefully:*** Make sure that staff duties are segmented so that no one person has complete control over any section of the information or cash flow.

***Use automated/mechanical devices:*** Make use of things such as standard, pre-numbered forms and checks to better keep track of your financial transactions.

***Hire qualified personnel:*** For example, bring on people you know you can trust and ensure that employees' responsibilities are consistent with their qualifications.

It is inevitable that as an NGO matures, policies will need to be reviewed, activities amended, and systems kept up-to-date. Effective organizational development requires that all systems, including those associated with financial management – such as accounting and internal controls – be examined and upgraded regularly to ensure the efficiency, reliability, and ultimate success of the organization. Now that we've considered the best ways to run your NGO financially, let's turn our attention to seeking funding sources and sustaining the life of your organization.

# Funding Sources & Financial Sustainability

## Funding Sources

Once you have defined your mission statement and strategic vision, analyzed your internal and external environments, and identified ways to strengthen your organizational and financial capabilities, you can begin to focus on looking for donors that match your NGO's mission and objectives. There are numerous sources of donor funding available to NGOs. Domestically, most governments provide some funding sources to support the activities of local NGOs, often for specifically designated programs. International donors include governments (e.g., most European countries, Japan, and the United States), International Organizations (e.g., United Nations agencies and the European Commission), and international NGOs.

The internet is an extremely useful source of information for potential donors. Some NGO websites carry extensive information about donors and funding opportunities. Governments and international organizations also maintain detailed websites on their activities and funding opportunities.



### Website Links

Some examples of online sources to help find and apply for U.S. Government grants include [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) and [www.USAID.gov](http://www.USAID.gov), while the sites [www.EC.Europa.eu](http://www.EC.Europa.eu) and [www.UNDP.org](http://www.UNDP.org) provide additional information on grants.

While benefiting from grant funds is often a good way to help your organization get started, you should not depend solely on grants to support your operations and activities. Your goal should be to move towards independence and financial sustainability.

## Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability is a long-term, ongoing process, requiring effective strategic planning. Your organization should look for income generating activities or local funding sources for long-term financial sustainability. Strategies may include establishing an endowment, attracting multiple donors to fund different activities, and diversifying your funding base through income generation projects, fees for services, and membership dues. It is important that dependence on external donor funds be reduced if sustainability is to be assured.

## Networking

Another approach to enhancing sustainability is to form a partnership or network. A network is defined as an alliance of individuals or organizations that share their resources in pursuit of common interests

and goals. Networks may link together NGOs, the private sector, government departments, research institutions, the media, or other entities based on a geographic area or sector focus (such as education or women's rights). One of the many advantages of networking is that it can increase financial and programmatic resources for a project or campaign.

To learn more about strategic planning, organizational development, financial management, and financial sustainability (including funding sources), you should consult one of the many websites that offer guidance and information to NGOs.

# Afghan Women's Empowerment (AWE) Grants Program

Excellent work! Now that you have a strategic vision and mission statement for your NGO, let's spend some time seeing whether your organization is a good fit for AWE. The second part of this guidebook will provide you with information on AWE's goals and objectives, as well as the scope and nature of the AWE Grants program.

## **AWE's Mission**

AWE grants are intended for civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and universities, to undertake projects advancing women's participation in political life. Grant proposals should meet one or more of the following AWE priorities:

1. Encouraging women's participation in Afghanistan's political realm
2. Increasing women's advocacy for legislative change
3. Raising women's awareness of their constitutional rights within Afghanistan's complex legal traditions
4. Developing women's leadership, networking, and advocacy skills

## **Selection Criteria**

Each application will be evaluated by a selection committee of U.S. Embassy Kabul employees. The selection criteria are as follows:

- The project supports one or more of the AWE priorities outlined above
- The award amount is \$5,000-\$50,000
- The project has a clear plan with a tangible outcome.
- The organization has demonstrated that they have the technical capacity, organizational capability, and leadership to carry out the project.
- The organization is Afghan-led.
- The costs are reasonable, allowable, and allocable and the proposal is cost effective.
- The project is scheduled to be completed in one year or less.
- The organization is non-partisan and not working on behalf of a specific political party or lobbying for a particular political agenda.

## Application Procedures

Applicants may submit their proposals to the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan by emailing a completed application form to [KabulAWEGrants@state.gov](mailto:KabulAWEGrants@state.gov). Applications in English, Dari, and Pashto are accepted, though English is strongly preferred. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Applicants may expect to receive notification within 90 days of submitting their proposal.

## What activities are not funded by AWE?

Now that you know the type of programs and activities that AWE is trying to support, it is also necessary to know what we *cannot* fund. Should you have any questions regarding what expenses are allowable or disallowable, you can always contact the U.S. Embassy.

AWE funds cannot be used for the following programs or expenses:

- ◆ NGO start-up costs, operating costs, or capital improvements
- ◆ Purchasing office decorations or automobiles
- ◆ Establishing a center\*
- ◆ Projects that contain the appearance of partisanship
- ◆ Scholarships or academic analytical research\*
- ◆ International travel\*
- ◆ Citizen exchange programs with foreign countries\*
- ◆ Medical and psychological research, clinical studies, or health care services
- ◆ Projects of a commercial or profit-making nature
- ◆ Cultural presentations, cultural research, cultural clubs, and festivals etc.
- ◆ Language training courses\*
- ◆ Entertainment events (such as receptions, social activities, ceremonies, tours)
- ◆ Political party activities

*\* Exceptions may be made if the activity is part of a broader program or is justified within a given program.*

## Contact Information

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