



MUSEUMS & GALLERIES
COMMISSION

Producing a forward plan

Stuart Davies

MGC Guidelines for Good Practice

Museum & Galleries Commission

The Museums & Galleries Commission (MGC) was established in 1931 and is incorporated under Royal Charter. It advises the Government on museum matters with the central aim of promoting museum and heritage interests, and raising museum standards. In pursuit of this aim, the MGC seeks to further the interests of UK museums by:

- providing expert and impartial advice to Government, and to museums individually and collectively;
- developing agreed standards in relation to conservation and collection care, scholarship and visitor care, and encouraging and helping museums to adopt these standards and secure funding to that end;
- raising standards in museums by operating effective grant schemes and highly selective revenue-funding.

The Chairman and 15 Commissioners are appointed by the Prime Minister. They serve in a personal capacity and are unpaid. The MGC's small professional staff is headed by the Director, who, as Accounting Officer, is responsible to Parliament for the grant-in-aid received from the Department of National Heritage.

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1 The Benefits of Forward Planning

1.1 Introduction

'Plans are nothing; planning is everything' (*President Eisenhower*)

'Forward planning' is crucial to the good management and future security of museums and art galleries. It is a **process** which can guide museums through the difficult times which many are currently experiencing, producing better services and greater efficiency as well as a useful document (**the forward plan**). Many funding agencies now demand evidence that a museum has been through a process of forward planning and the Museums & Galleries Commission advocates forward planning as an essential feature of the well-run museum. These Guidelines are designed to give a simple, straightforward introduction to the benefits and process of forward planning.

1.2 Definition of 'forward planning'

Can we produce a definition of 'forward planning' that will help to guide our thoughts? You may find that there is no shortage of definitions, but we suggest this one:

'Establishing a clear view about where the museum is heading and how it will get there.'

This definition incorporates three key principles of forward planning:

1 'Establishing a clear view...'

The process involves consultation within and outside the museum to achieve agreement among all the interested parties (**the stakeholders**) about the future direction of the museum.

This part is vital because agreeing the overall view considerably increases the chances of successful implementation of detailed objectives later. This agreed view may be expressed in terms of a 'vision', 'mission' and strategic aims.

2 'Where the museum is heading...'

Once agreement has been reached about the general direction of the museum, it is important to establish some milestones, or **goals**, along the way. These are 'objectives' and they can normally be achieved within a specific time period. They are backed up by 'targets' which focus on short-term tasks and can be linked to small teams or individuals.

3 'How it will get there.'

Forward planning is not just about vision and milestones. It also includes 'strategy' or *how* the museum is going to achieve its goals. That means considering the allocation and application of resources – people, money and other things like buildings and equipment. Unless the forward-planning process clearly identifies how the museum is going to achieve what it has decided to do, then the chances of achieving anything are severely reduced. This 'how' part also includes performance management – a way of helping to see how the museum is progressing towards achieving its goals.

So, this is what forward planning is. But, except for keeping funding bodies and bureaucrats happy, why do you need to bother with it?

1.3 Why planning is important

There are certainly no shortage of reasons given by museum trustees, managers and curators why they don't get engaged in forward planning:

Reasons Not to Plan

- I didn't come into museums to spend my time planning.
- We're too busy dealing with day-to-day problems.
- We don't have time.
- We're only small.
- I have it in my head.
- Everyone knows where we're going.
- We don't know how to.
- Things are changing too fast.
- Nothing's happening anyway.
- We haven't got any money; it's not worth it.
- We started but we got really bogged down and ran out of steam.
- No-one ever asked us to.

(List courtesy of Michael Day)

Most of them are short-term responses. Forward planning is not a quick process; it is about planning for the longterm and needs an investment in time (and commitment). But then museums are about longterm objectives, the care of collections for future generations, often pursued with minimal resources which have to be used efficiently and effectively. Under these circumstances common sense ought to convince us that longterm planning is essential.

But the benefits of forward planning can also be seen on a day-to-day basis within the museum, enabling it to simply work better:

Benefits of Forward Planning

- Helps to ensure longterm guardianship of collections.
- Everyone (inside and outside the museum) is clearer about what it is trying to achieve.
- Everyone in the museum knows how they fit into the museum's aims and objectives.
- It leads to more effective use of resources.
- It integrates all parts of the museum's operations in one management process.
- It provides a framework within which strategic decisions can be made.
- Produces a plan which acts as a point of reference for all stakeholders.

It needs to be emphasised that while the forward-planning process does produce a forward plan, that is not necessarily its most important outcome. The actual process of thinking about what the museum is trying to achieve and how it is trying to do it, may, in fact, be far more valuable. Forward planning gets people thinking about the museum's purpose and how it can be successfully fulfilled. The plan is a convenient way of summarising the results of these considerations and presenting a statement about the museum's purpose and goals to the outside world.

We would argue that the process of forward planning is at least equal in importance to any formal document produced. But actually having a written document is still very important because it acts as a focus for strategic thinking and decision-making and is tangible evidence of the processes you have been through, and hopefully will continue to go through. Furthermore it helps your museum to demonstrate credibility to outside bodies who may be considering whether or not to offer you funds.

A Forward Plan Will Enable You...

- To systematically record the decisions you have already made in the forward-planning process.
- To help monitor your progress towards achieving your agreed aims and objectives.
- To act as a framework and basis for continuing strategic thinking and decision-making about the future of your museum.
- To demonstrate to others that you have gone through the forward-planning process and have made decisions.
- To demonstrate your credibility and viability.
- To accompany bids for additional funding, sponsorship, etc.
- To meet the requirements of funding bodies which insist that you have one.

There are also some broader benefits to the museum for having a forward plan. It answers (for those most closely involved with it) key questions about the museum, without which it may not be able to function effectively.

Defining the Museum

A forward plan provides the museum and its staff with:

- A sense of purpose. (What are we here for?)
- A sense of audience. (Who are we here for?)
- A sense of direction. (Where are we going?)
- A strategy. (How are we going to get there?)
- A financial framework. (How are we going to pay for it?)
- A sense of achievement. (How well are we along?)

2 How to Start Planning

2.1 What should your forward plan look like?

Once you have decided to produce a written forward plan, how do you go about writing it, what should go in it and what should it look like? There are no hard and fast rules about the forward plan. You will even find it called all sorts of different names, such as business plan, strategic plan, development plan, etc. These terms are broadly interchangeable although the emphasis of approach will be different. Contents, structure and appearance will depend on your museum's particular needs. There is no one 'best way' of preparing a forward plan, but here we are recommending a model which includes the essential best practices which those in museums who have got (and use) forward plans have recommended to us.

What sections would you expect to find in a good forward plan?

- 1 Mission statement.
- 2 Situation review.
- 3 Strategic aims.
- 4 Current objectives.
- 5 Performance Indicators.
- 6 Appendices (if absolutely necessary).

But simply ensuring that you have 'something' under each of these headings does not necessarily make a 'good' forward plan? So what does?

A Good Forward Plan Is...	... And It Will
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Strategic.● Integrative.● Short.● Achievable.● Consistent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Identify current objectives and strategies.● Clearly identify resources.● Clearly allocate responsibilities.● Include an implementation timetable.● Provide measures of performance.

1 It should be strategic. The forward plan must always focus on the key strategic issues; the things that really matter to the success and well-being of the museum in the longterm. Because of this it is important that the vision, mission and strategic aims are clearly stated. They set the 'keynote' for everything that follows in the plan and in what the museum is actually trying to achieve.

2 It should be integrative. All the key activity areas of the museum should be included in a single forward plan. The temptation to produce a pile of plans for individual sections or units, or indeed separate functional strategies (eg. marketing), ought to be resisted if they form an alternative to a single integrated document.

3 It should be short rather than long. There are two potentially conflicting views about the length and content of a forward plan. The first is that it should be a very detailed reference work containing considerable amounts of data and information describing what the organisation does as well as what it intends to do. It will often also include a record of the consultative and analytical processes (eg. SWOT) involved in forward planning as well as the conclusions derived from them. The second is that it should be a short document focusing on key issues and featuring only the outcomes of detailed discussion and analysis.

While the first has its place, and certainly the detail should be readily available for reference within the organisation, we believe that the second is more appropriate because:

- a. A shorter plan is more likely to be used internally as a working document throughout the organisation;
- b. A forward plan must **succinctly** communicate the museum's intentions and aspirations to external stakeholders; and
- c. A shorter plan is more likely to be read. The results of the analytical processes may form an optional appendix or be retained for internal consultation only.

4 It should clearly identify the current year's objectives and how they are going to be achieved. What the museum intends to achieve for the current year should be at the core of the forward plan. Each objective should be related to one of the museum's aims. It should be supported by information on the following:

- a. How will it be achieved (the strategy).
- b. What resources are available to enable it to be achieved.
- c. Who is responsible for achieving it.
- d. When should it be achieved by.
- e. What indicators/measures will help monitor its progress towards being achieved.

This should be succinctly conveyed and presented in such a way that the above five points easily relate to the objective they refer to and to each other. A tabulated form has worked well in many forward plans.

5 The number of aims and objectives should be limited to that which is achievable.

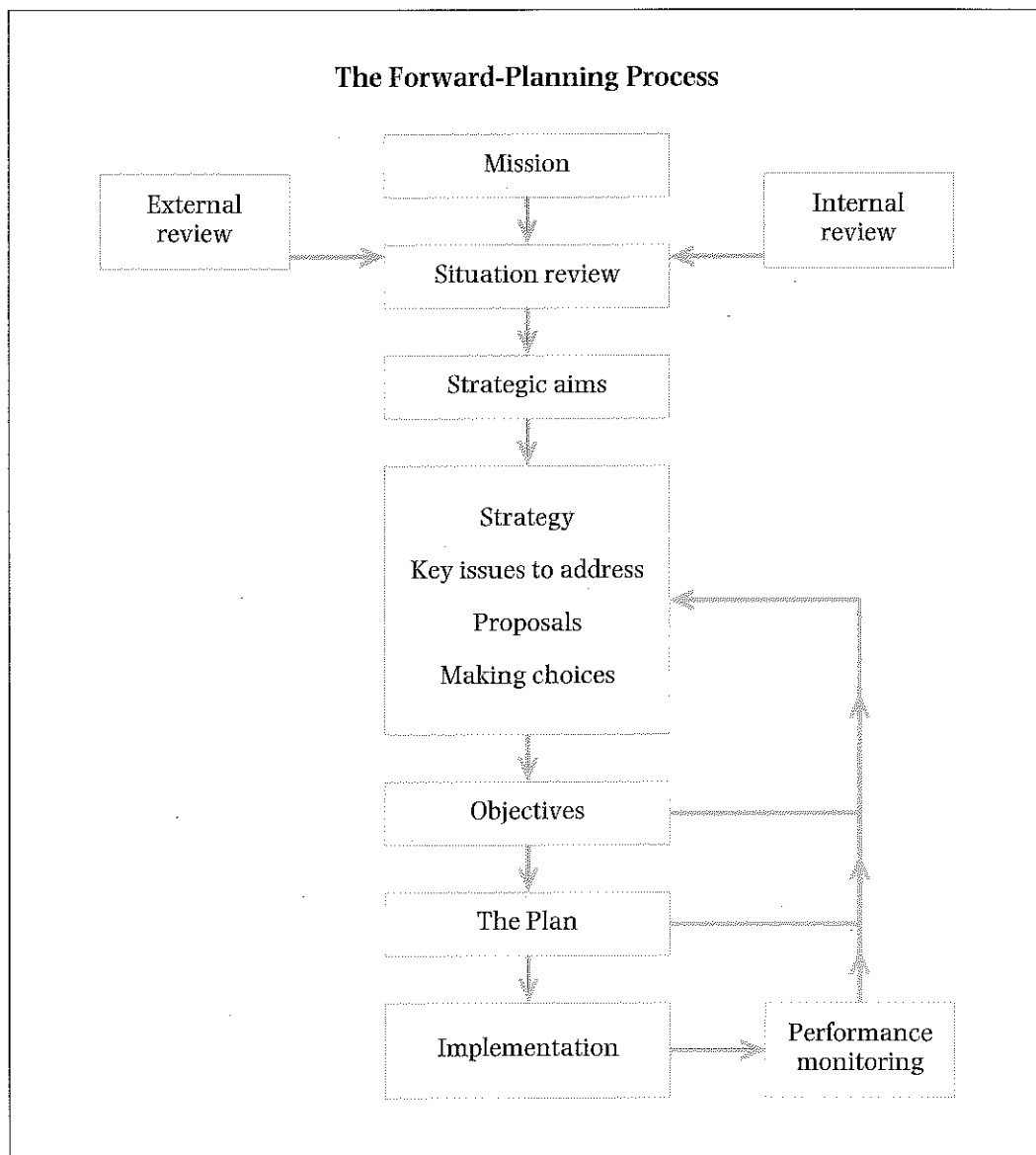
The forward plan should not be cluttered up with meaningless or hopelessly ambitious aims and objectives. It should, above all, be achievable.

6 It should be internally consistent. Objectives should relate to an identifiable 'aim' and both should make a clear contribution to fulfilling the museum's vision, mission or purpose.

7 It should cover a specific period of time. Most forward plans are for a period between two and five years. The most appropriate length will vary from organisation to organisation. It is probably difficult to 'plan' meaningfully beyond the current year and next year. Most publicly funded museums are only allocated financial support on a yearly basis anyway. It is nevertheless still possible to look beyond the immediate financial horizon, though inevitably in less and less detail the further ahead you go. We would recommend a two to three-year time horizon but it is essential that the plan is reviewed and revised on an annual basis.

2.2 Introducing the forward-planning process

The first important thing is to decide how are you going to tackle this (perhaps daunting) task? The best way is to see it as a process that has a number of stages and you intend to move systematically through them, one to the next. This keeps the process rational and maintains a sense of order. Any 'strategic management' (which is what we are talking about) textbook will supply you with a forward-planning process diagram or 'model'. Unfortunately although they all contain roughly the same elements, no two are exactly the same and none of them were produced with museums in mind. Our 'model' includes all the key elements for museums, the arrows indicating in what order they should be tackled:



This 'model' shows all the key stages in a forward-planning process and how they relate to each other. We will follow these through one by one.

One important thing must be kept in mind throughout. Forward planning offers a real opportunity to change the direction your museum is going in (hopefully for the better). However, there is a tendency for participants to treat it as a 'clean-sheet' exercise. In other words, to act and make resolutions with scant regard for what already exists. This is fantasy forward planning!

In reality, most forward planning is about recording and validating what we are doing already and what we are already committed to. Remember that museums are like most organisations; the majority of their resources are committed to core activities which it is difficult to ignore or change without seriously impairing the organisation's mission. So, in museums, for example, the majority of resources are directly or indirectly committed to the collections, their care, interpretation and presentation to visitors. Since the unique defining-point of museums is their collections this would seem to be entirely appropriate. Similarly, most museums are tied to their existing buildings. However much they would like to be free of them, in reality it is relatively rarely possible to 'start again'. The realities of what we already do and are committed to must therefore be reflected in our forward planning, and everybody involved needs to understand that point.

But first some consideration has to be given to **who** should be involved in the process. Remember that the most effective forward planning is that which promotes commitment through consensus. How can that be achieved?

2.3 Getting people involved

As a guiding principle we suggest that the more **stakeholders** that are involved the better. This will not necessarily be the easiest way to do it. Producing a forward plan quickly is best achieved with as few people as possible. But it will not achieve consensus within the organisation and so is therefore more likely to be either rejected or be left unused. Either way, the whole exercise will have been a waste of time.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders are any individuals, groups or other organisations that have a legitimate interest in the museum. They may include trustees, museum staff, funding bodies (eg. the local authority; the Area Museum Council; the Museums & Galleries Commission), 'friends' groups, volunteers, visitors, etc.

To be successful you should want as many people as possible to participate in the forward-planning process and to be committed to its outcomes.

Members of staff

Every effort should be made to give all members of staff an opportunity to contribute to the forward-planning process. How this is done may depend on the size of your museum, but we suggest that groups of staff should meet together to discuss what the museum's purpose is, what are the key issues that need to be addressed and what the museum's **strategic aims** (those few vital longterm goals) should be.

External stakeholders

One thing which should be stressed to 'in-house' staff teams involved in forward planning is that while their contribution is valued, it is not the only one and the views of external stakeholders also have to be taken into account. Canvassing the views of external stakeholders and ensuring that they make an appropriate contribution to the process is more difficult. It is probably best left to the first or second draft stage when there is something substantial or at least partly worked through and 'agreed' internally. These stakeholders will typically include funding bodies (present and future), managers from other organisations or another part of the same one (for example, in a local authority) and possibly even governing bodies.

Senior museum professionals

The role of the senior museum professional/manager/curator needs to be thought through carefully. He or she should be quite clear what part they intend to play in the process of collecting views and formulating a forward plan from the bottom up. We suggest that they set key parameters for the exercises. Teams need to be aware within what boundaries they are expected to make their contributions. For example, which potential suggestions would be 'politically unacceptable' to the governing body and therefore need not be discussed. Most teams actually appreciate it when clear parameters and boundaries are set; it enhances the feeling of being treated professionally and it would mean that any conclusions they arrive at have a real chance of being accepted by the governing body. Beyond that, we suggest that the senior professionals/manager should act, as far as possible, as an equal member of the team, contributing helpful guidance, when required, on what may be complex issues. His or her only other major contribution will be a final revision before it goes to the governing body, not to alter the content but to ensure that the presentation standard is high.

Consultants

The role of consultants needs to be considered. One problem with an approach which encourages the 'bottom up' involvement of staff teams, is that they may lack direction because that leadership role is often adopted by the most senior professional/manager/curator, and there may be a belief that whoever 'leads' the team sessions (and that probably includes recording their thought processes and ultimate conclusions) will not be able to participate fully in the process. The solution may be to use an appropriate 'facilitator' to lead the sessions, provide an objective element in the proceedings and probably actually produce the draft documents in accordance with the teams' wishes. A skilled facilitator will make a very positive contribution to the process and 'ease' it for the participants.

This, it must be stressed, is not the same as inviting consultants to come in and write your forward plan for you. We do not feel that this is advisable, because although you may get a very professional-looking plan at the end of it all, it will probably not really be 'owned' by the organisation. When seeking a suitable facilitator we suggest that you try and find somebody who knows the sector well, who has experience of doing this sort of work in another museum, and somebody you will feel comfortable with. Your Area Museum Service will be able to provide advice.

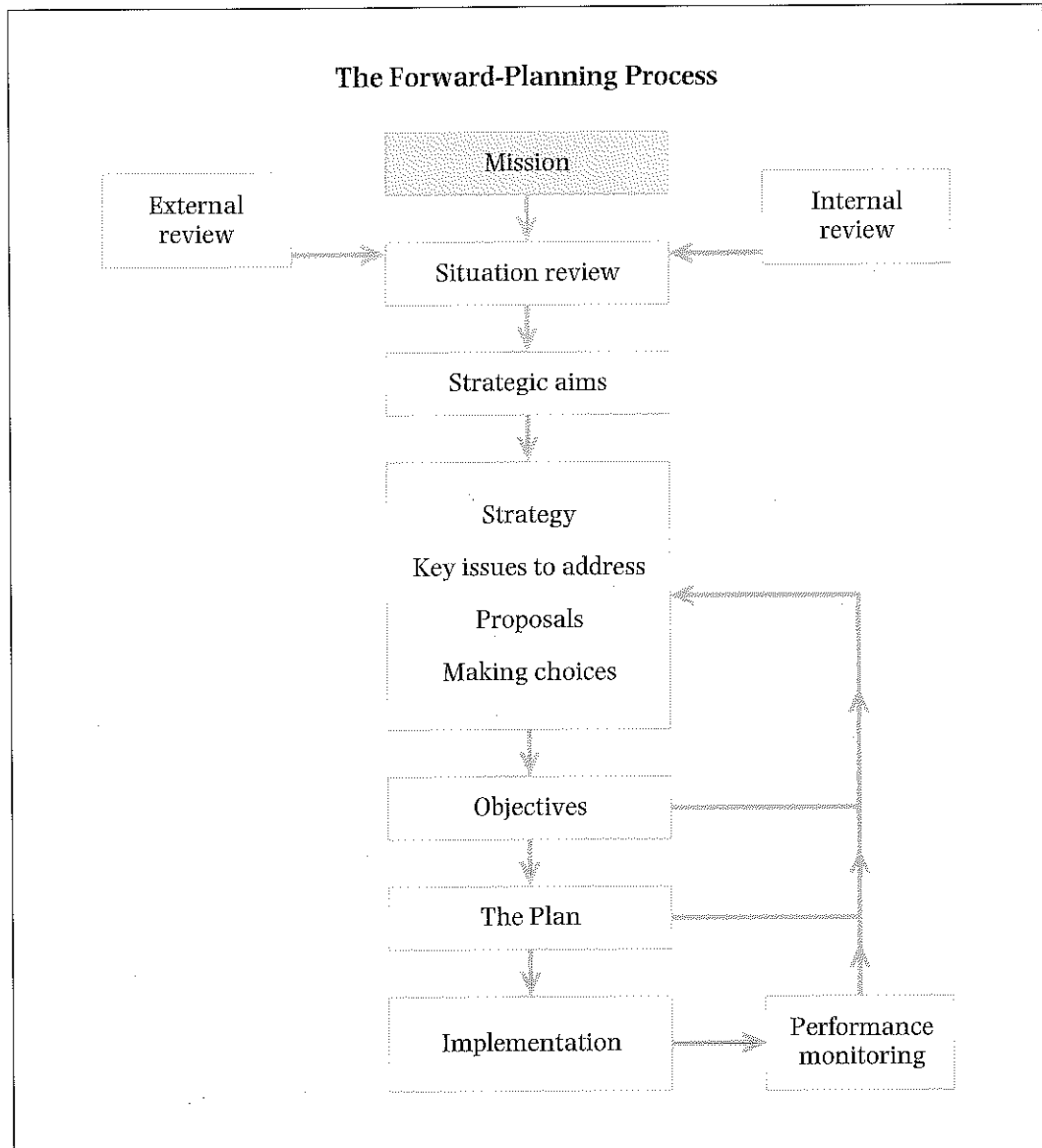
3 Producing the Plan

3.1 The forward-planning process

Now we've considered who is going to be involved, and how, let's make a start on the forward-planning process.

Mission

At the pinnacle of the process is the museum's mission. You may already be very clear about this and indeed may have a written mission statement. But it is still worth discussion in some detail because only in that way will you all be sure about what you are trying to achieve. And until you have done that you cannot write an effective forward plan.



Ideally, the mission of an organisation answers five key questions about it and tries to summarise these succinctly in a 'mission statement'.

Mission

- Why we exist (purpose).
- What we believe in (values).
- What we want to achieve (goals).
- What we do (function).
- Who we do it for (audience/stakeholders).

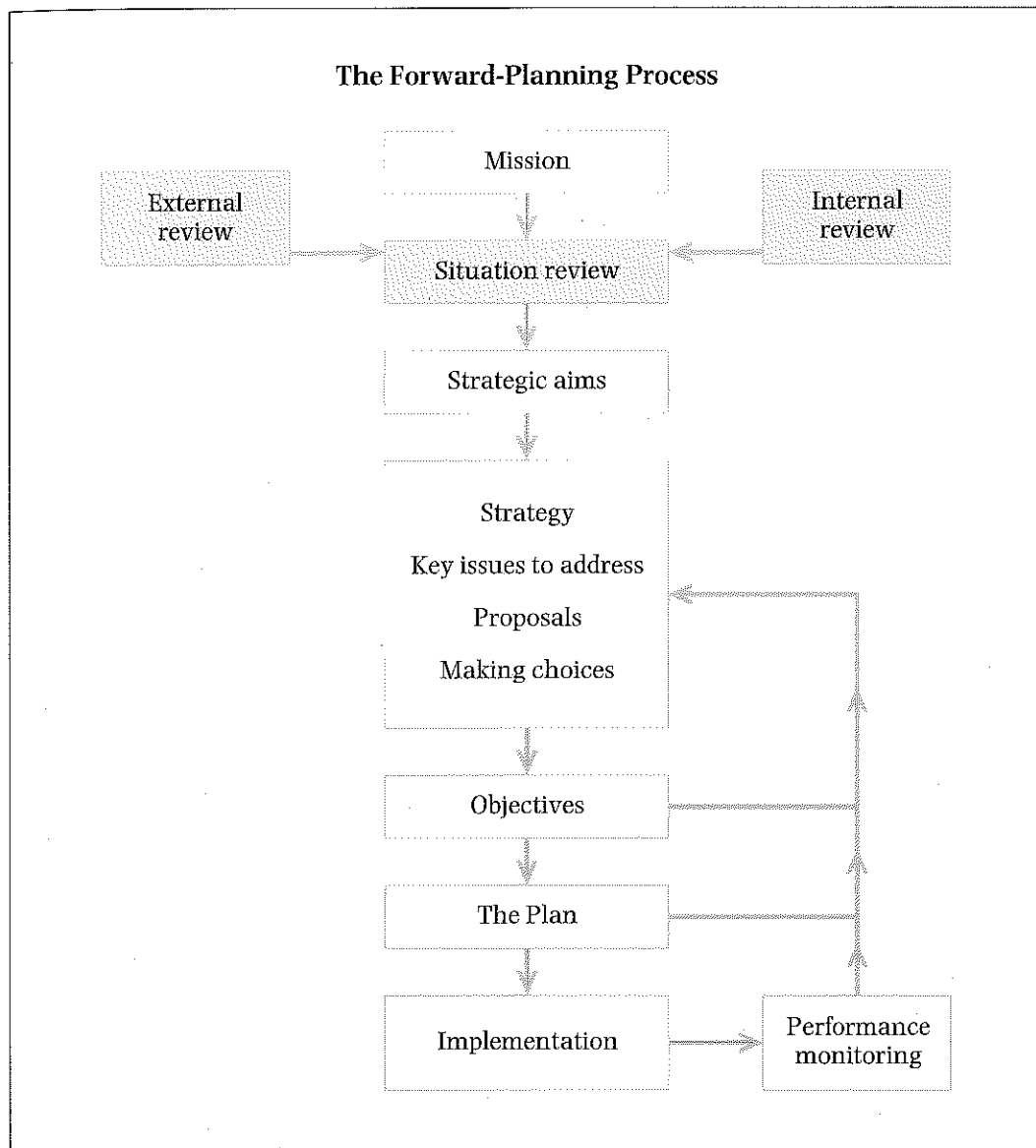
Mission Statement

A set of words that briefly encapsulate the purpose, values, goals, strategy and target audience of an organisation in an informative, and, hopefully, inspirational way.

The 'mission statement' is not always highly regarded because while it is easy to write something bland and meaningless, it is very difficult to produce a good one. To try and do so is important because apart from being a good advocacy tool for the museum, the mission statement can provide a useful reference point for the whole forward-planning process.

As in most aspects of forward planning, the mission needs to be thought through carefully and the museum team should methodically 'develop' the mission. Investment of time and effort at this stage of the forward-planning process is very well worth it, because in trying to define the mission so many crucial questions have to be asked and discussed.

Situation review



Once the mission has been clarified, a review needs to be carried out of the museum's current situation. Carrying out a full 'situation review' could be an enormous task for even the smallest museum. One could investigate every aspect of every activity that the museum is engaged upon. Such a thorough review of each activity should periodically be undertaken but it will probably be difficult to do it all at once because of practical considerations such as 'who will do it?' and 'how much time will it take?'. You will probably, therefore, have to be selective about which issues you look at in detail.

The situation review will include aspects both external and internal to the museum. You will need to begin the **internal review** by trying to identify what appear to be the key issues confronting the museum. As many people as possible ought to be engaged in this initial 'brainstorming'. The most common way of doing this is to carry out a SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats – analysis. This lends itself well to a group meeting where those present can list what they see are the museum's strengths and weaknesses (ie. things **internal** to the museum) and the opportunities and threats

waiting for the museum in the outside world (ie. external to the museum). These can be presented in a simple grid:

SWOT Analysis	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

Many museum SWOT analyses go no further than producing lists on the grid (and then reproducing them as an appendix to the forward plan). However, to get the full benefit from SWOT analysis you should do two other things. First of all get the people doing it to prioritise the lists so that the most important (or key) issues are highlighted. ('Being strategic' is largely about being able to pick out the significant things from the rest.) Secondly some thought then needs to be given as to whether you can match your strengths with the opportunities, because this suggests an important way forward for the museum. Similarly, when weaknesses and threats match, you need to give them particularly careful attention.

SWOT is a powerful analytical tool which can get all your team engaged in the forward-planning process. However, in addition to that, you also need to devote specific time to assess what emerged from it in more detail. This will usually include taking a thorough look at how the museum has been performing in the past, and what it might be capable of in the future (the internal review). But you also need to see your museum in a wider context to evaluate how external forces may affect your museum in the future.

For the purpose of the forward-planning process it is more advisable to select a few key 'internal' strategic issues and look at them in detail. Each museum will need to draw up its own list to match its mission and circumstances, but the following are typical areas that might be looked at:

1 Visitor numbers:

What have been the trends over the last ten years? Are visit numbers increasing or decreasing?

2 Finance:

What has been the trend over the last five years? Has the museum's budget been increasing, or is it, in real terms (taking inflation into account), decreasing? Can you forecast whether or not future years' budgets will be adequate to maintain your current activities/services?

3 Collection management:

How complete is the documentation of the collections? Are the collections well cared for, or may some of them be 'at risk' because of poor environmental or storage conditions?

4 User services:

Are all the services we provide (eg. school loans, identification of artifacts) being used to a level that makes them cost-effective? Have there been any changes in take-up over the last five years?

5 Commercial activities:

Are these yielding a satisfactory level of income? What have been the trends over the last five years?

It will be seen from the above that this analysis is, at least in part, about comparing the situation now with what has been happening over the last five to ten years. The purpose of this is to enable you to identify any problems and then to decide what to do about them.

Particular attention should be paid to financial analysis. A forward plan should indicate clearly that:

- a. A revenue budget exists for the museum;
- b. That capital implications and future needs have been considered, and that
- c. Appropriate financial management mechanisms are being operated.

Different types of museums (eg. independents and local authority) have quite different financial reporting and monitoring needs. However, all need to present revenue information which tells us:

- a. Patterns of expenditure;
- b. Sources of income.

Our recommendation is that this information is presented for a five-year period; the last two years' **actual** expenditure and income, the current year's budget and the projections for the next two years (or the duration of the forward plan, if that is longer). It is also important that the information presented is broken down into suitable headings or cost centres. A typical example might look like this:

Financial Plan	1993/4 Actual	1994/5 Actual	1995/6 Budget	1996/7 Budget	1997/8 Budget
Expenditure (£)					
Salaries/wages					
Building costs					
Admin costs					
Overheads/recharges					
Equipment					
Equipment maintenance					
Exhibitions					
Activities					
Projects					
Purchase fund					
Total Expenditure					
Income (£)					
Local authority					
AMC grant-aid					
Other grants					
Sponsorship					
Fees/rents					
Donations					
Trading					
Total Income					
Net Surplus/Loss					

It will clearly be necessary to provide definitions for the categories you use (which need not be precisely those given in the example above), and it will not necessarily be possible to forecast figures (especially those for income) accurately. But a forward plan must provide evidence that a credible and realistic financial-planning regime does exist in your museum.

The key areas to look at in the **external review** are as follows:

1 Governance:

Will the governance arrangements for your museum change in the foreseeable future? Is it possible that the governing body may be reconstituted? Are you about to become a unitary local authority? What changes will that bring about?

2 Political:

What effect would a change of government have on your museum? How far do you rely upon the current administration for grants? What impact would a change of power within your local authority have? Would it lead to a changed attitude towards delivering direct services, supporting independent voluntary groups, or in the type of services it will give priority to?

3 Legislation:

Is there any key new legislation coming along which could impact directly upon what you do? More commonly, is there any apparently unrelated legislation which may have unintended consequences for you?

4 Social and demographic:

Do you anticipate any social or demographic changes having an impact upon your services? What are the key changes anticipated and how might you wish to (or be expected to) respond to them?

5 Economic and planning:

Are there changes about to occur in the local economy which may impact upon your visitors? Might there be a shift, for example, from high-street/town-centre shopping to out-of-town greenfield sites? What consequences would this have for the museum? Are there any major planning zone changes or significant development proposals which could either affect the museum, or in which the museum would like to participate?

6 Markets:

What market opportunities might present themselves? What are the trends in visits and income generation? Who are your competitors and is the competition going to get stronger?

7 Technology:

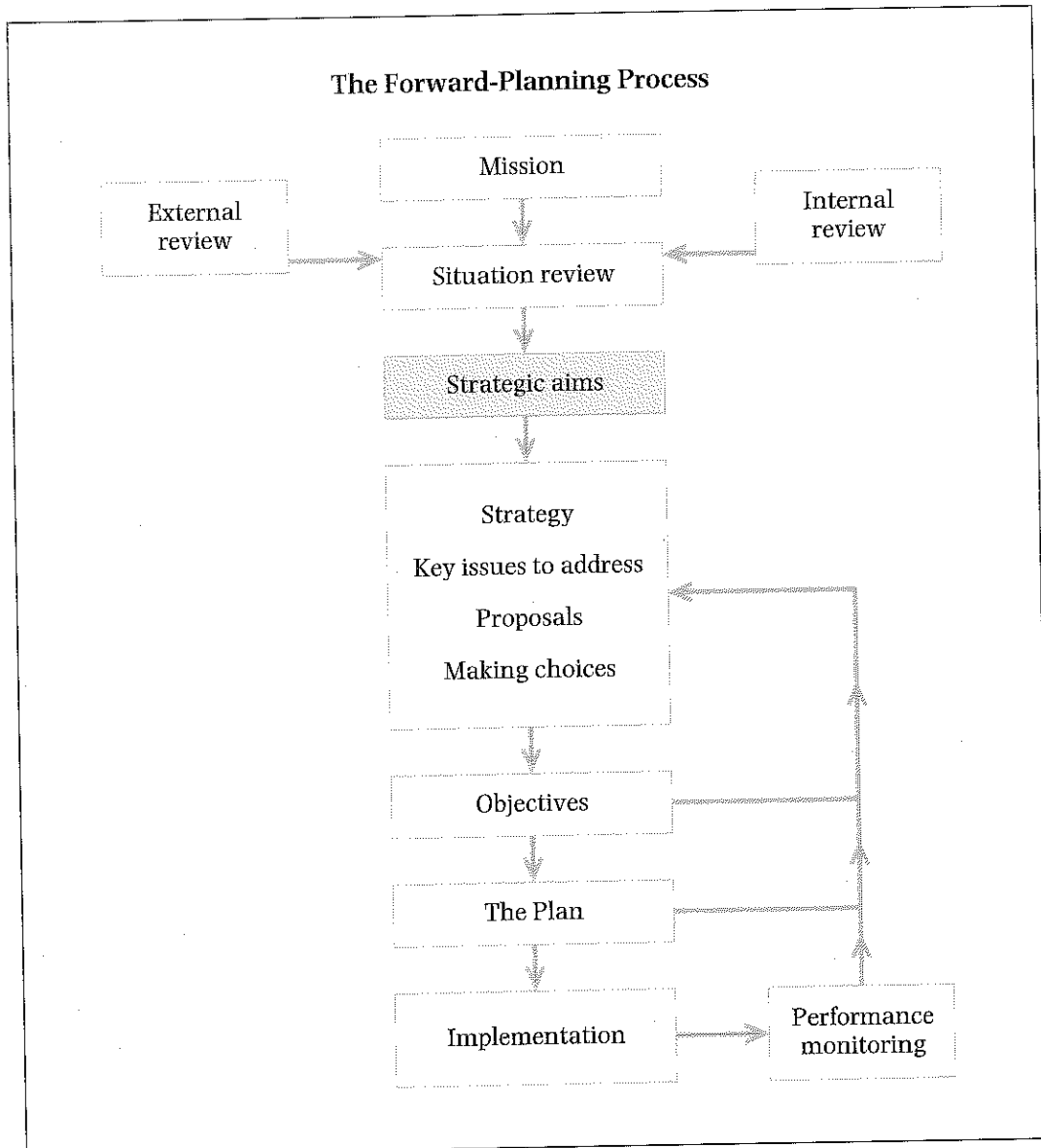
What technological innovations may either affect you or be available to you?

8 Standards:

What external standards may you need to conform or aspire to? (eg. Registration Phase II.)

All this analysis may be time-consuming (and difficult), but when you bring it all together you will have a valuable picture of the **key issues** currently affecting, or likely to affect, your museum in the future. These issues will indicate to you what are the **critical success factors** for your museum: the things which you have got to get right if you are going to achieve your aims and be judged successful. Once these have been identified you are ready to formulate your **strategy**, or how you intend to deal with what you have discovered.

Strategic aims



After the situation review, we need to agree the **strategic aims**. There are a small number of key goals which are either always going to be important to the museum, or at least will be, for the foreseeable future. Hopefully it will be possible to recognise direct links between elements in the mission and the strategic aims.

Strategic aims need to be attainable but not necessarily in the short-term. It may, for example, be one of a museum's aims to completely refurbish all its galleries, but that might take ten years. On the other hand, a strategic aim may be timeless, as, for example, in seeking to 'make a valued contribution' to the cultural life of a city. This is an 'ongoing' aim where the focus for achievement will be more on the annual objectives.

Developing Strategic Aims

- They must be genuinely strategic and few in number.
- They must be agreed upon as the result of wide-ranging consultation inside and outside the museum.
- They must be realistic and achievable.
- They must be as specific as possible.
- They should relate to the key activity areas of the museum.

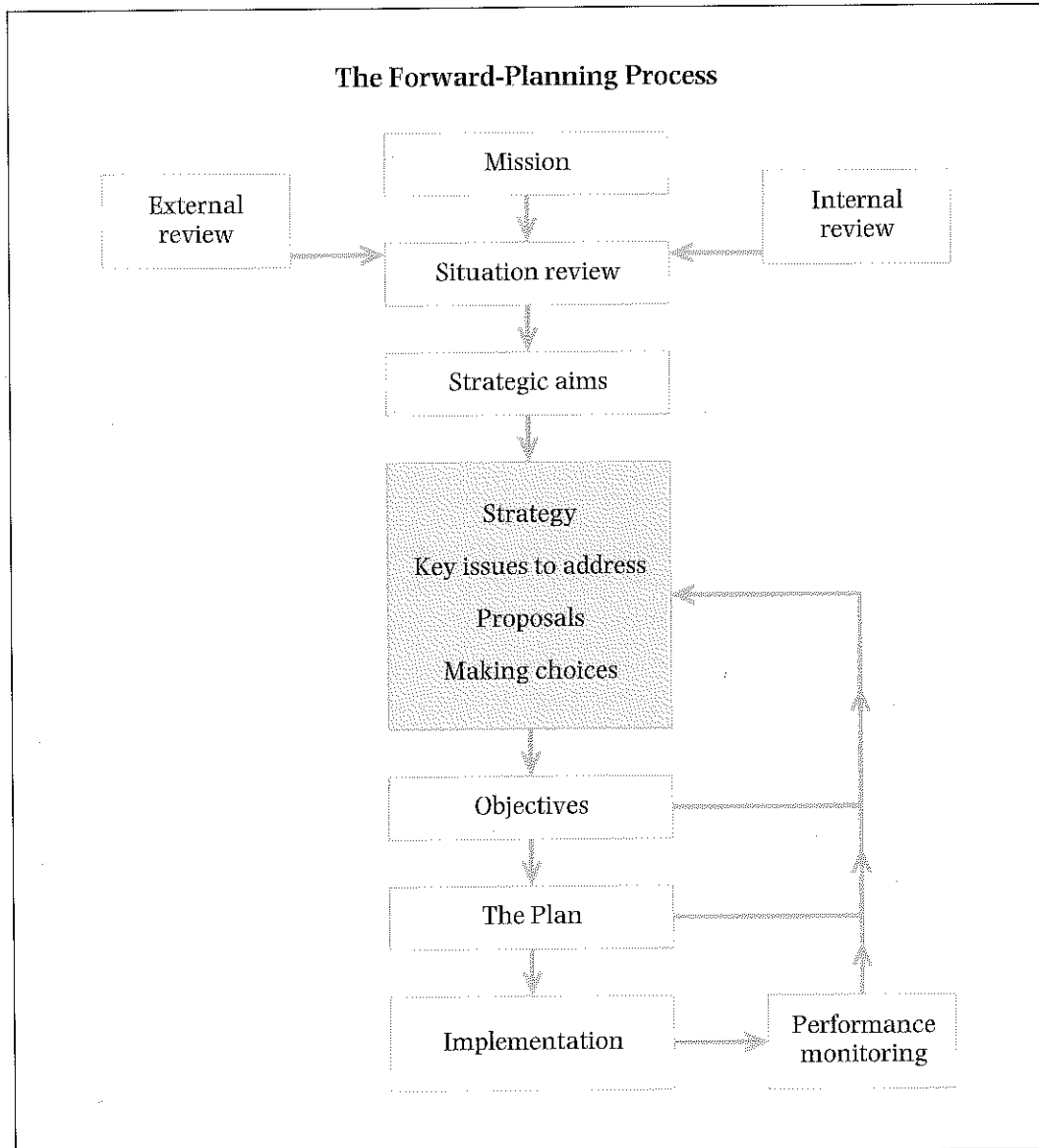
Each strategic aim will probably relate to a key activity area of the museum, for example:

- Collections management.
- Access to collections and services.
- Social/community contribution.
- Education/outreach.
- Resources management.
- Satisfying key stakeholders' aspirations/interests.

In local authority museums, it is important (and an efficient use of your time) to ensure 'matching' between strategic aims in the forward plan, and similar statements in other internal documents such as service mapping or plans.

Most museum teams have little difficulty in agreeing what are the key-or core-activity areas of the museum. What is much more difficult is to allocate limited resources between the aims and to fund the best way (or ways) to achieve the aims. This is where the museum needs to consider its strategy (or strategies) for achieving its aims, and that is the next part of the forward-planning process.

Strategy



Strategy is about turning your mission and strategic aims into successful action. It's as simple as that. Unfortunately it is actually the most difficult part of the forward-planning process. This is because there are no simple formulae or sets of rules which will guarantee success. Furthermore having a 'plan' may help but that won't guarantee success either. Why do we bother with the 'strategy' bit at all then? The reason is basically that it helps us to reduce uncertainty.

We all live in an uncertain world. Museums are no exception. Developing a strategy to get the organisation from where it is now to where we would like it to be includes taking into account our strengths and weaknesses, the resources at our disposal, and the external opportunities and threats. We use that knowledge to help us reduce uncertainty in the pursuit of the goals we have identified as desirable. Please remember, however, that strategy does not eliminate uncertainty, it only reduces it. As we have already noted, it cannot guarantee success.

The first stage of determining strategy is to look at the agreed strategic aims, the

strategic moves and critical success factors you have identified and produce some proposals as to how to proceed to achieve or deal with them. This is a very important part of the process and deserves plenty of time being devoted to it. The museum's governing body, management team or whichever group has to decide what strategies are going to be pursued, must ensure that the full range of options are put forward for consideration. Too often we have seen museums making important strategic decisions based on too narrow a consideration of the problem because too few solution options were presented in the first place.

Once all the proposed options for strategies have been assembled then choices have to be made. There are some simple **strategic choice tests** which can be applied to each option. They are useful because they help to ensure that all the options are evaluated using similar criteria. The three most useful tests are:

1 Is it appropriate?

Is this the sort of thing that you feel a museum should be doing? (eg. wedding receptions in the galleries).

2 Is it acceptable?

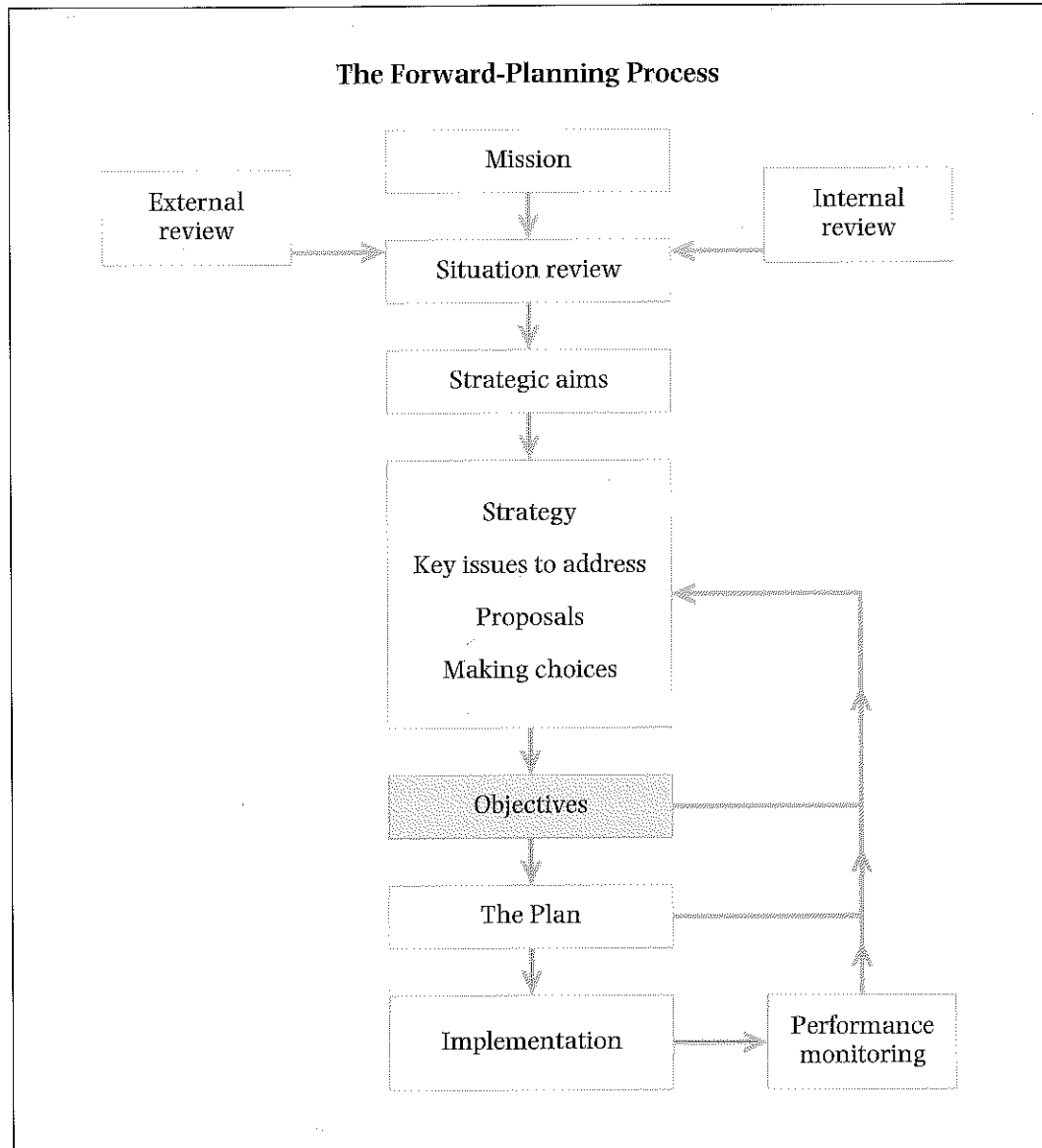
If you did this, would your governing body or other stakeholders (including visitors and the media) accept this? Is it legal? Would it arouse hostility among those whose support (or at least neutrality) you value?

3 Is it feasible?

Have you got the capacity to actually do it? Is what we want to do in danger of out-running our capacity to do it? Do our people have the necessary skills? Can they be found from elsewhere? Has the museum got the resources (people, money, buildings, equipment, etc.) to actually be able to do this?

Throughout the forward-planning process it is important to always be asking if what you are proposing is feasible. Can it be achieved? If not, then drop it. There is no point in 'setting yourself up for failure' by pursuing either unattainable aims or embarking on strategies which ultimately will founder and not help to achieve your aims.

Objectives



Once the strategy, or more likely, a series of strategies, has been agreed upon, it is then possible to set detailed objectives. These are short-term goals related to each strategic aim and which are expected to be achieved in an identified period of time. To be effective they must be specific and measurable in some way, in contrast to the strategic aims which may be quite broad and perhaps longterm. The same strategic aim might be current for the whole period (say three years) of a forward plan, but objectives would normally be much shorter term, typically being expected to be achieved within a 12-month period.

The simple example in the box below illustrates the relationship between strategic aims, strategy and objectives.

Linking Strategic Aims, Strategy and Objectives

- Increase the number of visitors to the museum (strategic aim).
- Raise the profile of the museum (one of the strategies to be employed).
- Double the production of publicity leaflets this year (one of the objectives).

To make sure the objectives for the year proceed as expected, it may be necessary to set specific targets to be achieved, and link these to a particular team or to individuals. But these need not appear in the forward plan. Rather, they should be set by the museum's management team as part of the process of monitoring progress towards achieving the objectives.

3.2 Writing the plan

Now you should be ready to bring together all the information you have assembled and the decisions you have made. These can be 'written up' as your **Plan**. The following format is suggested as a model:

MODEL FORWARD PLAN

1 INTRODUCTION

Sets the scene by **briefly** describing the museum/museum service; what buildings, collections and people it includes; how governed; size of budget; principal achievements in the past five years; clear indication of who benefits from the museum service; what sort of response it has had from its audiences and stakeholders.

2 MISSION STATEMENT

3 SITUATION REVIEW

Key Service Statistics

You should list here any information that would be helpful in indicating the scale of the museum's operation and its capacity to develop in the future. For example,

- Visit figures.
- Number of staff/functions/grades.
- Budget.
- Size and range of collections.
- Number and location of museum buildings (please include a map).

Key Issues to be Addressed (no more than six)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Critical Success Factors (no more than six)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Financial Plan (Revenue)

Financial Headings	1993/94 Actual	1994/95 Actual	1995/96 Budget	1996/97 Projected	1997/98 Projected
Expenditure (£)					
1 Salaries/wages					
2 Building maintenance					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
Total Expenditure					
Income (£)					
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
Total Income					
Net Surplus/Loss					

4 STRATEGIC AIMS

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

5 CURRENT OBJECTIVES

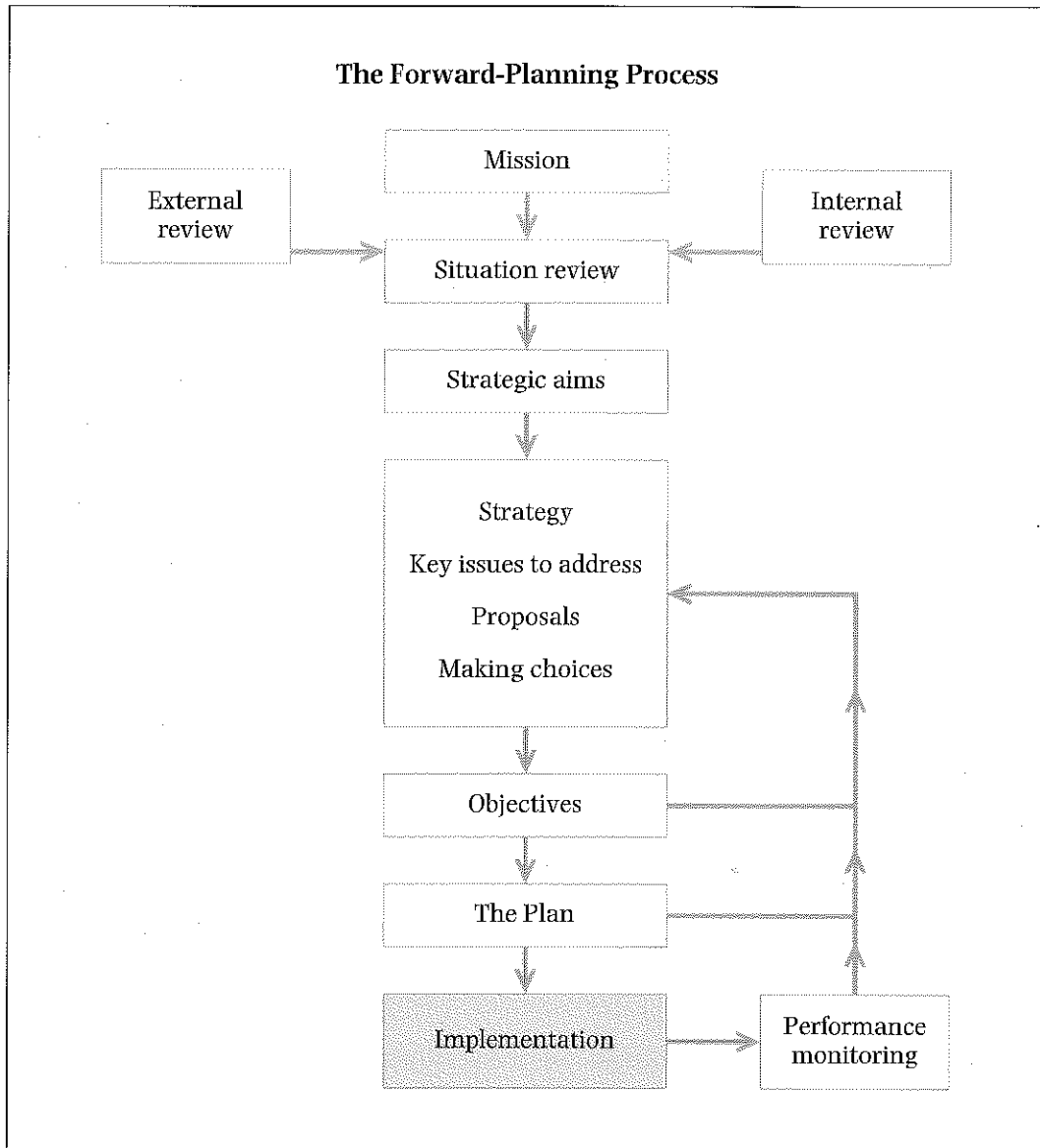
Aim: (one taken from List of Strategic Aims)					
Objectives	How to be achieved	Resources available	Who is responsible	When to be achieved	Performance Indicators
1					
2					
3					

6 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicator	1993/4 Target	1993/4 Actual	1994/5 Target	1994/5 Actual	1995/6 Target	1996/7 Target	1997/8 Target
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

4 Making the Plan Work

4.1 Implementation

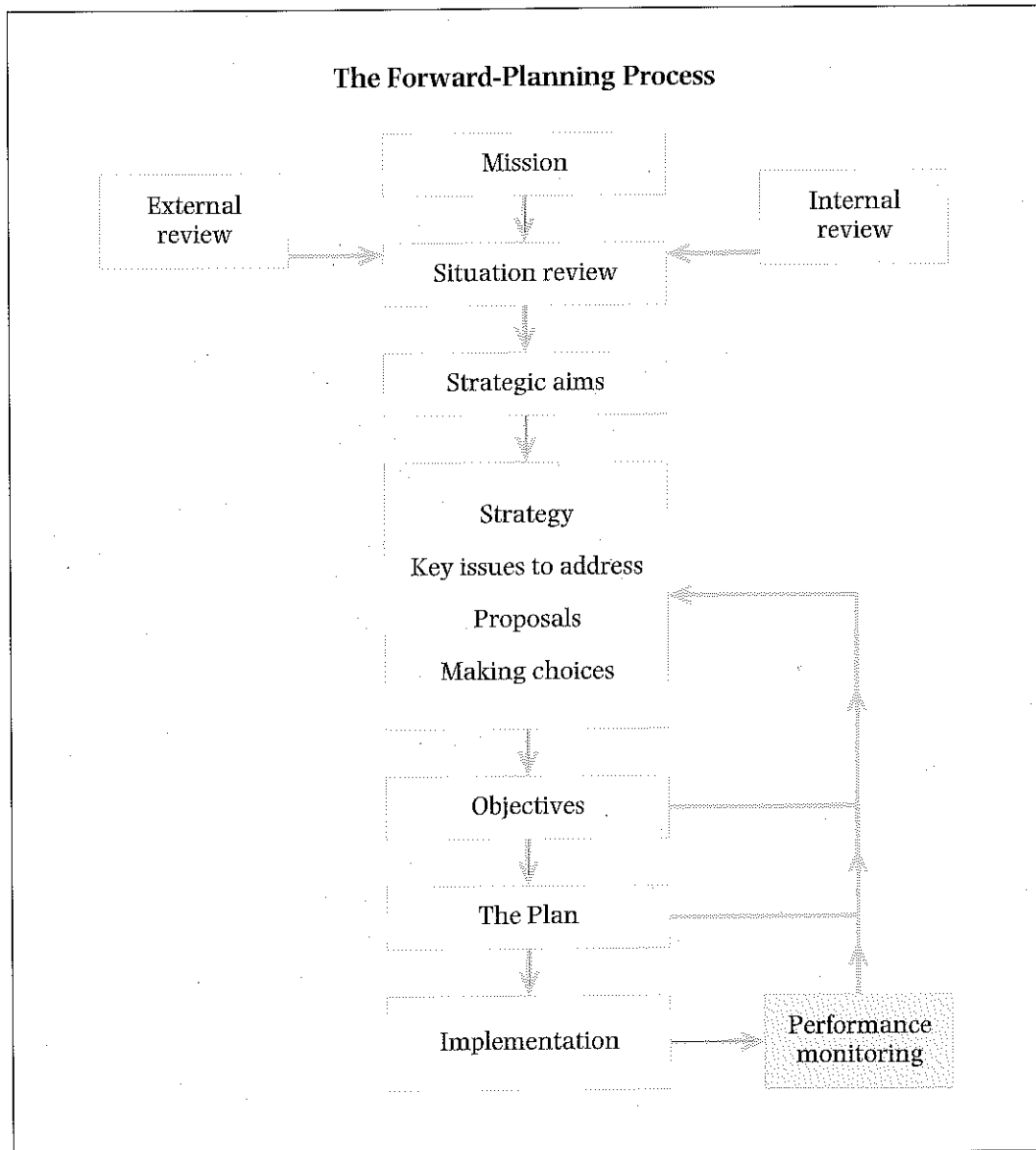


Decide what you want to do and then make sure that the whole organisation is doing it! What we have been describing is a hierarchical system of goal-setting that extends from the very broadest 'vision' for the whole museum, right down to a specific target to be achieved by a specified individual, perhaps by the end of the month! Many of the most successful organisations have managed to ensure that all the stages in this chain are closely linked to, and dependent upon, each other, thus ensuring that the agreed broad vision and purpose is reflected right down to the smallest detailed activity.

Now that you have a forward plan, you may find that you and your staff need additional professional or management skills in order to achieve your goals. The *Investors*

in *People Standard* provides a framework for developing people to achieve the goals set by their organisation. The *Standard* assists in making effective use of all resources by developing a culture of continuous improvement. The Museum Training Institute is producing support materials for museums wanting to work towards *Investors in People*.

4.2 Monitoring your performance



There is no point of going to the trouble of producing a forward plan if you do not monitor your progress towards achieving the aims and objectives contained within it.

At the simplest level this can be done by regularly reviewing the current year's objectives and see whether or not they have been done. Failure to meet objectives should be investigated and the plan may require amendment.

However, most museums want to track specific performance measures or indicators to help demonstrate credibility or efficiency. There are some dangers in over-emphasising

statistical indicators, if only because there is a tendency to measure what is easy to measure rather than what is important.

Nevertheless key indicators which would add to the credibility of any forward plan might include:

- Number of visits.
- Income as a percentage of total expenditure.
- Number of school parties booked in.
- Number of museum objects documented.

Each museum will want to develop its own list, but we recommend keeping it short. As with the financial information discussed earlier, the returns should be presented for previous years, as well as offering targets for coming years.

A continuous process

Finally, it must be remembered that the forward plan is not a static document. The museum should make provision for its regular (usually annual) review and update. It needs always to be a current and 'live' document, or it very rapidly loses its value and relevance.

4.3 Tips from 'the experts'

In preparing these Guidelines, we have read and received a great deal of advice, most of it very good. Those who are actively engaged in forward planning have offered numerous 'tips', and we think it would be useful to just list some of these to remind you of some things to look out for when forward planning.

- Don't spend too much time thinking about doing it; just get on with it.
- Don't try and make perfect or elaborate forward plans; it should be a working document, not a work of art.
- It is very important that the Head of the museum gets involved and is fully committed.
- Involve as many people as you can.
- Be clear about why you are doing this and for whom.
- Create time for the process and keep it going at a smart place.
- Expect forward planning to expose uncomfortable facts and truths (and to create tensions within the museum).
- Consultants are useful in the process but responsibility for decisions and the plan lies only with you.
- Never forget who this is ultimately supposed to benefit – your users, visitors, customers.
- Remember forward planning is like all management processes – a means to an end, not an end in itself.