

Terry's Tips for Readyng A Plan for Adoption and Success

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There are a variety of ways that planners elect to organize plans or planning reports. Based upon my almost 20 years of experience in the profession, I believe the most successful plans contain and are organized as follows:

- An “Executive Summary” of the main goals, ideas, and recommendations of the plan (usually no more than five pages).
- A brief “Introductory” chapter or section describing the plan’s organization and content.
- An “Analysis and Findings” section that distills important facts and data about existing conditions of an area or context that is being evaluated, to help convey a sense of place to the reader. Sometimes this section or chapter includes an analysis of “assets, liabilities, and opportunities” (ALO) of the area being evaluated. Sometimes the ALO is highlighted as a separate section or chapter.
- Recommended “Alternatives and Strategies,” which are clearly advanced, sometimes broken into short-term versus long-range plan categories.
- A “Preferred Plan” scenario, which can be highlighted within the section described above or set forth separately.
- “Implementation Strategies” to help bring the plan to fruition. Often such a section will include guidance about the necessary institutional resources that may be required, as well as references to where and how a community can leverage resources beyond its own revenue base –including private, state, or federal resources.

Plans that communicate their ideas coherently and persuasively have an improved likelihood of being seriously considered and followed. Coherent and persuasive communication involves strategic use of narrative and graphic material. Careful editing and proofreading is essential. Punctuating text with visual images help to animate and convey ideas. For plans that have a more organizational, process, or less place-centered focus, use of flow charts, tables, and text boxes can help engage and navigate the reader, and enhance the fluency of public officials with the main ideas and recommendations being advanced.

Always consider how well the text and images of a plan will reproduce or print. Rarely do planning officials and citizens have access to “camera-ready” originals. Poor or faded graphics or images can doom serious consideration of a plan.

Remember: *planning is a verb!* A plan or planning report needs to engage its intended audience. The quality of the document that is created involves both *form and content*.