

# Ingredients of a successful strategy



## An overview

This '10 ingredients of a successful strategy' was compiled by SIB staff involved in strategy development. Views were gathered through a survey and workshop. It draws on our collective experience advising on strategies across a broad range of areas including, amongst others, Infrastructure, Asset Management, Housing, Green Growth, Energy, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls and Tackling Paramilitarism and Organised Crime. Based on our collective experience, these are the ingredients we believe necessary to deliver a successful strategy in the public sector.

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## Ingredients of a successful strategy

- 1 **Mandate**
- 2 **Vision and Clear Purpose**
- 3 **Leadership**
- 4 **Team**
- 5 **Collaboration**
- 6 **Integrity**
- 7 **Data and evidence**
- 8 **Delivery**
- 9 **Flexibility**
- 10 **Accessibility**

# Strategic narrative – telling the story of an imagined future: as it is now, as it will be, and the pathway to get there.



## 1. Mandate

This is about getting authority and cover, ensuring senior buy in, having champions and friends and political support. It helps if the timing is right, and the issue is a high priority for the public, politicians and stakeholders. As a first step, ensure there is an agreed mandate, and the necessary approvals and support are in place to commence the work.

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## 2. Vision and Clear Purpose

Ensure there is a clearly defined need, agreed outcomes and a common understanding of what success looks like. Everyone must be clear on the problem the strategy seeks to fix. Weave a common thread through the strategy – making sure the actions link back to the benefits the strategy is designed to deliver.

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## 3. Leadership

There must be clear leadership and ownership of the strategy development, and of the strategy itself. Leaders should be visible, supportive, and front and centre as the voice of change. Leaders must enable the team to fail safe and learn fast, balancing risk and progress.

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## 4. Team

An experienced, committed and technically competent team is essential for strategy development. Think about the mix of skills needed – the technical experts, the networkers, the thinkers, the doers, the writers, the communicators and so on. Act early to build the team.

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## 5. Collaboration

Strategy development is about partnership and helping people to shape and jointly own the change. The emphasis here is on the nature of the collaboration – engage early, do it right, don't overdo it and understand its purpose. Understand the meaning of terms used and apply the correct approach e.g. collaboration – working with someone to produce something; or engagement – involving people who may be affected by the decisions or influence the implementation of the decisions. All are important and need to be done well. This aspect is critical for delivery.



## 6. Integrity

This is about the being honest through the strategy development and delivery. It is doing what is right, not what is easiest. Often this means candid conversations about the best way forward towards workable solutions. Integrity and credibility help to reassure stakeholders about the change and the pathway to achieving it.

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## 7. Data and Evidence

The importance of data and evidence cannot be underestimated. It must be used to clearly identify the problem, need or failure, provide a baseline for measuring change and to inform decision making. It is also equally important to learn from best practice nationally and internationally. The basic message here is build the strategy on fact. However, there will come a point where action is required, and data will never be perfect.

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## 8. Delivery

There must be a focus on delivery from the start of the strategy development process. Build in delivery in the form of an action plan, governance and money. Also be clear on who will be responsible for delivery and make sure practitioners are involved – they know what will work. It must not be a collation of all that is already underway.

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## 9. Flexibility

There must be flexibility in developing and delivering the strategy. Make sure there is the ability to pivot quickly when required. Whilst the goal may remain the same, achieving it will be iterative, consistently learning, reshaping, and adapting.

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## 10. Accessibility

The look and feel of the strategy is important. The strategy must be well-written, accessible, and clear, and many people will only read the summary or remember the targets. Visuals are important and valuable way to engage stakeholders.

The **strategic narrative** runs throughout – from concept to delivery. Strategies focus on a different future, often decades ahead. The difficulty with looking too far into the future is that uncertainties stack up and sometimes it is hard to see the link between the imagined future and the actions of today. This is where the strategic narrative or storytelling comes in. The strategic narrative evolves and reinforces messages, reflecting where we are along the pathway. This is critical in persuading people to act in the present for something in the future.

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