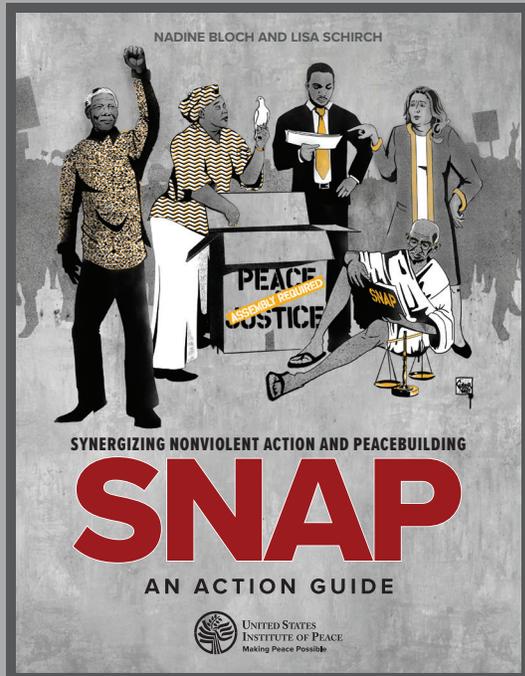




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BY NADINE BLOCH AND LISA SCHIRCH

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UNIT 2

**Start Strategically for Successful
Conflict Transformation**

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

Understand strategy and planning as critical components of transforming conflict

Identify the key elements of strategic planning in a six-step process

Recognize how strategic planning can support the appropriate sequencing of nonviolent action and peacebuilding methods to achieve conflict transformation goals

UNIT

2



Start Strategically for Successful Conflict Transformation

Strategic planning is necessary for any group that wants to rely on more than luck and good intentions to achieve its goals. Strategy takes creative thinking and organizing. It means not just taking to the streets or the negotiation table and hoping for the best. A good strategy lays out a carefully planned set of actions and contingencies and anticipates the actions of other conflict parties. Effective strategic planning should integrate a wide variety of nonviolent action and peacebuilding tools and approaches.

This is the first of four units on strategic planning. Starting strategically means first identifying a vision of the future and your mission in relationship to that vision as part of a six-step planning process. Later units will flesh out remaining steps, including conducting assessments, setting SMARTT goals, choosing tactics, and creating implementation time lines.

U.S. Civil Rights Movement

The U.S. civil rights movement (1942–68) held a **vision** of a desegregated United States where all people had the right to vote, rooted in the **values** of racial equity, human rights, and justice. The **mission** of the civil rights movement at this time was to restore universal suffrage in the southern United States and overturn legal segregation.

An **assessment** of points of intervention revealed that segregated businesses and public assets like lunch counters, transportation, and schools were particularly vulnerable to public pressure. Based on this information, the movement launched specific campaigns to meet specific **goals**: desegregation of lunch counters, bus seating, and other segregated public spaces. The movement's **overall strategy** was to turn public opinion against institutionalized racism, impose economic costs on businesses upholding segregation, and secure substantive reform in U.S. law. These goals would require combined **strategic steps** of various tactics, such as litigation, the use of mass media, boycotts, and demonstrations, as well as sit-ins and other forms of civil disobedience.

Hundreds of thousands more participated in a wide variety of **tactics**, including marches, boycotts, and voter registration drives throughout the U.S. South.

Organized mass nonviolent tactics helped expose the national racial segregation crisis and leverage this knowledge into widespread organized confrontations and interventions. These actions brought key people, including business owners and elected officials, to negotiating tables across the southern United States. In turn, the movement catalyzed an intervention by the federal government to overturn segregation laws in southern states, move the passage of the national Voting Rights Act of 1965 in Congress, and end legal discrimination in housing, education, and employment.

Adapted from "The U.S. Civil Rights Movement (1942–1968)," International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, accessed June 29, 2018, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/the-us-civil-rights-movement-1942-1968/>.

Key Concepts

WHAT IS STRATEGIC PLANNING?

As Antoine de Saint-Exupery wrote, “A goal without a plan is just a wish.” Strategy is generally considered to be a way to achieve specific goals under conditions of uncertainty. Strategic planning is a way to chart how to achieve a goal through clear action steps and ongoing assessment.

WHAT DOES STRATEGIC PLANNING HAVE TO DO WITH CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION?

Strategic planning in the SNAP context means determining when and how to use relevant nonviolent action and peacebuilding methods to achieve specific conflict transformation goals. For illustrative purposes, we use the Curle Diagram and its focus on power, awareness,

and justice to structure our strategy discussion (see figure 5). To move from latent conflict to sustainable peace and justice, you need good strategy.

The rest of this guide contains units focused on elements of strategic planning to support functions such as assessing conflict, building power and capacity, and maximizing participation and inclusion in both non-violent action and peacebuilding processes.

FIGURE 5.

Curle Diagram: Latent Conflict



Good strategy naturally includes a synergy of nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes.

What Are the Components of Strategic Planning?

General components of strategic planning include six steps (shown in figure 6): vision and values, mission development, assessment, goal setting, strategic steps, and tactical implementation.

Vision: The broadest description of what ideal conditions would exist in your desired, transformed, sustainable future.

Values: The principles and deeply held beliefs that are the framework for building the desired vision of the future world; these are included in the vision.

Mission: Your group's specific purpose or reason for existing—what you want to do to advance the vision you hold.

Assessment: A systematic evaluation of all the factors that could have an impact on reaching your vision through your stated mission. Usually includes analysis of internal organizational strengths and weaknesses, as well as external threats and opportunities.

Goals: Specific and measurable things you want to accomplish—defining how much you will accomplish by when. Most goals fall into three main categories: internal organizational development, external programmatic work, and network/

community capacity building and outreach support.

Strategic steps (objectives): The plan for HOW you will achieve your goals and move closer toward your vision. Includes identifying specific non-violent tactics and articulating an actionable theory of change.

Implementation or action plans: Identifying WHAT tactics or activities will be done, by WHOM and by WHEN, and WITH what resources/budget. Action plans can turn into very detailed accounts of how strategies will become real activities or **tactics**.

Theory of change: A theory of change links these seven steps together. It is a strategic narrative that explains how your strategy will achieve your goal. The following sentence is an example of a theory of change: Local farmers in Ghana will be able to make more money from their crops if they work together to form their own farming cooperative and refuse to work with international corporations. *[Your goal] will happen if [the target] does [action that brings about goal] and they will be induced to do this by [tactic/approach].* Change is, of course, never guaranteed. But being explicit in naming how your theory of change will influence your goals is the first test of your proposal. You

If (the target) is influenced by (tactic/approach) to do (an action), then (your goal) will happen.

FIGURE 6.

Strategic Planning Pyramid



could also state this as an if-then statement: If (the target) is influenced by (tactic/approach) to do (an action), then (your goal) will happen.

For specific examples, see the “Beyond the Page” exercise on page 51 where there is a guide to developing the Strategic Planning Pyramid.

How Does Strategic Planning Help Activists and Peacebuilders Build a More Sustainable, Just Peace?

“If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up someplace else.”

—Yogi Berra

Since tactics are often more immediately gratifying than conducting an assessment or strategic planning

process, they tend to be a primary focus for activists and peacebuilders alike. But if you have not first identified goals and mapped out a way to achieve them, even the most engaging tactic will not get you closer to where you want to go. Worse, you may squander your limited resources in the process.

For example, repeatedly holding marches or rallies that do not attract new participants, fail to influence the opponent's behavior, and put participants at risk may be strategically unwise. Similarly, continuing to pursue negotiations or national dialogue processes that exclude key groups and reinforce power asymmetries is unlikely to yield results.

This is where the strategic planning and assessment processes come in. They are frameworks that help you better understand your situation and use your resources to develop a strategy that applies the appropriate tools from both the nonviolent action and the peacebuilding tool kits to achieve goals.

Strategic plans and assessments can also help in the learning and evaluation process. Critical to effective peacebuilding and nonviolent action is active learning. You need to be able to adjust and correct course as needed, based on the results of rigorous evaluation and assessment. Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is

common as people tend to do what they know or have done before.

Planning also enables organizers to be more intentional about choosing peacebuilding approaches or non-violent tactics. For example, it may make strategic sense to use lower-risk and less-resource-intensive tactics in contexts where there are attacks on non-violent movements. It means prioritizing activities based on available resources. Given that resources are often limited, planning processes that link ends to means, that identify tangible goals, and that evaluate the different methods of action based on likely impacts are essential to being an effective activist or peacebuilder.

Beyond the Page #1

The Blanket Game

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Facilitator instructions: *DO NOT SAY THESE OBJECTIVES BEFORE THE GAME!*

- To distinguish between strategy, goals, and tactics
- To talk about group dynamics in decision making, personal participation, and implicit bias
- To experience and talk about the importance of communication

SETUP:

- Place a blanket or sheet on the floor that will hold the number of people who are participating (standing close to each other).

HOW IT IS DONE:

1. Have the group stand on the blanket (groups of eight to twenty-five people work best). Use a blanket the appropriate size for the number of people (they should be slightly packed onto the blanket).
2. Then, present them with **The Great Turning Challenge**. The top of the blanket represents the troubled present, and the face-down side represents our desired future. In order to reach the desired, improved future, they need to flip the blanket over. Everyone must make it to the other side. No one may leave the blanket, lean on walls, and so on. Beyond the obvious team challenge, this framework can help a group focus overtly on the need for collective action to make social change (for what it is worth, it is a very doable task).
3. After the group successfully completes the task, help the group debrief and reflect on the experience. Make sure to give some space for any immediate reactions or feelings. And remember, even if you do not manage to flip the blanket without losing anyone, you will still learn a lot from the process.
 - **Feelings:** How did this exercise feel? What emotions did you experience? Did you feel heard? Were your needs met?
 - **Facts:** What actually happened? What was the goal? The strategy? The tactic(s)? In this case, the goal was given by the facilitator (flip the blanket over), the strategy was the method devised to

achieve the goal, and the tactics were the particular ways the group implemented the strategy.

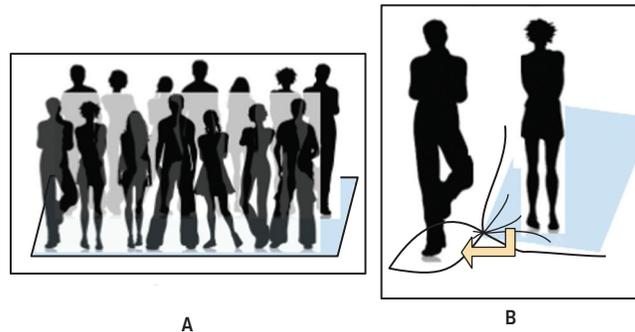
- **Group dynamics:** How did you all figure out what to do? Who made decisions? Who was listened to? Who was ignored? Did any issues surface?
- **Communication:** Did everyone know what was going on? When it was happening? Before? After? Insights on communication? Styles/process? How were communication and dialogue skills used?
- **On a personal level:** How did you participate? Did you take a leadership role? A follower role? Did you actively participate in finding a solution, or not? Why?
- **Future:** What did you learn from the exercise that you can apply in the future to strategic planning? Are there any insights or applications to your professional work? How do you and fellow workmates function under stress?

The following variations for the Blanket Game can be undertaken when the group has more time:

1. **Social learning emphasis:** Use a timer and time the group as the members try to turn the blanket over. After debriefing, ask if they would like to do it again. Again, time them. Groups will always do better the second time around, and this can open up a conversation about social learning—that once people figure something out they are able to repeat or replicate it more efficiently.
2. **Introduce a powerful opponent:** After running through the exercise once (or twice if you have

FIGURE 7

Blanket Game Solution



timed it), run through the game again with one addition: explain that while most people want a better future world (represented by flipping the blanket), some benefit from the unjust status quo and do not want things to change. Ask for a volunteer to act as a privileged power elite member who wants to stall or stop the great turning to a more just and equal world. This person can easily derail change (e.g., by touching their foot on the floor). Debriefs here will open up conversations about real-world campaign decisions on timing, sequencing, and

tactical choice: Persuasion? Dialogue? Negotiation? Use of nonviolent action (pick the person up or surround them)? Set a time limit on this version, as it is unlikely to achieve success without a fixed endpoint. (Another lesson!)

SOLUTION

Twist the blanket from one corner and move people onto the “new” side as there is room. See part A of figure 7, with everyone on the blanket, and part B, as the blanket is twisted and people can move onto the reverse side.

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