



WCMA
Washington City/County
Management Association
A State Affiliate of ICMA

Strategic Planning

Strategic Directions Session Agenda

1:00 pm–4:00 pm Monday December 8th, 2025

Focus: Identifying the Strategic Directions

Building on our current momentum, how will we work together over the next 3-5 years to strengthen WCMA, deepen member value and connection, and ensure our long term sustainability and impact?

Goals:

- To develop creative, engaging, and innovative solutions, group these into strategies and higher level strategic directions
- To generate shared ownership and individual commitment to continue the momentum for action

so that: the plan can be operationalized into focused and aligned action.

	Segment Focus	Aims
1:00-1:15	Check In Review Agenda	Facilitator guides brief check-in, then reviews today's agenda
1:15-1:30	Strategy Brainstorm: <i>What innovative, substantive actions will deal with the blocks and move us towards our vision?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set context and provide overview of the task• Introduce innovative ways of thinking
1:30-1:50	Small Group Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sharing, discussing, and deepening ideas• Agree on a set of ideas to bring to the full group
1:50-2:30	Crafting Strategies: Plenary Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discerning shared intent to reveal strategies
2:30-2:45	BREAK	
2:45-3:30	Developing Dynamic Strategic Directions: Plenary Discussion	Connecting the strategy "buckets" into arenas of clear directional purpose to sharpen our focus and gird the plan <i>Quick capture of success indicators/direction.</i>
3:30-4:00	Closing & Reflection	Crosswalk of the SDs to the vision and blocks Group reflects on their work and looks ahead to the next session.



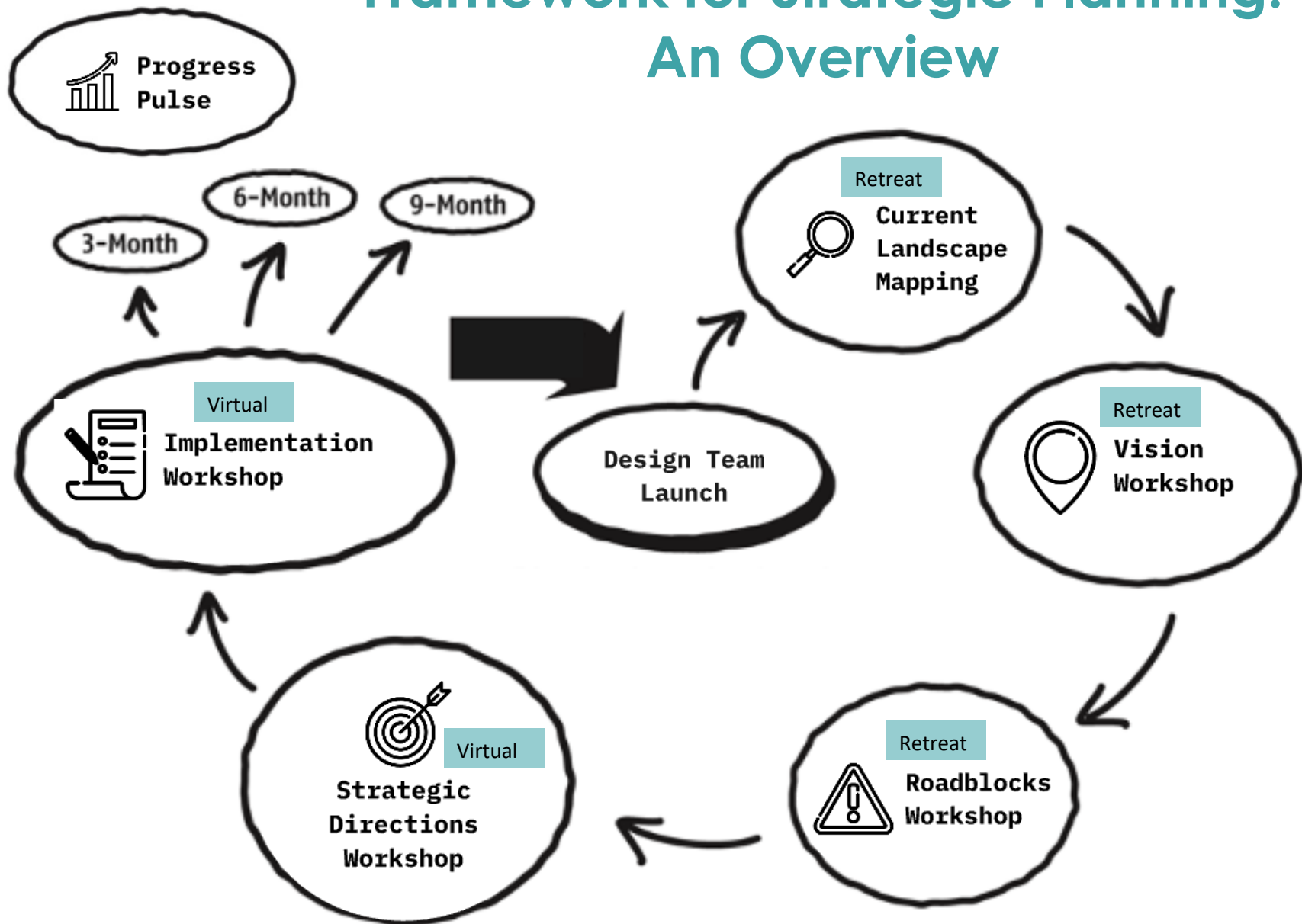
Board Retreat & Strategic Planning Worksheets

**WCMA Board Retreat
November 4th, 2025**

Building on our current momentum, how will we work together over the next 3-5 years to strengthen WCMA, deepen member value and connection, and ensure our long-term sustainability and impact?

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Framework for Strategic Planning: An Overview



Designed & Facilitated by Una McAlinden, CTF, Creative Strategy Solutions



What key information - from our past, present, and anticipated future - will help inform our planning?

Use these questions for your individual brainstorm. Try to have 1-3 items per column.

PAST		PRESENT		FUTURE	
Accomplishments	Setbacks	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
What have been important milestones and results?	What events and happenings have impeded progress?	Where do we currently have advantages?	What are areas that need growth & development?	What forces are working for us?	What forces are working against us?
Describe some significant efforts of the last 5-10 years.	What caused us to take steps backwards?	What is contributing to momentum forward?	Where are there gaps in effectiveness?	What doors are open to us?	What could “blow up” if not dealt with?
What are important areas of progress?	What factors have intruded on our plans?	What have we built that we do not want to lose?	What are some of the major organizational issues we need to address?	What are some ideas whose time has come?	What other potential dangers lurk in the future?

VISION THINKING PROMPTS

Imagine it is 5 years from now, and WCMA's work is being highlighted nationally as an outstanding example of a professional association that truly advances local government excellence. You've been selected to meet with representatives from other state associations who want to learn from your success. What would you be proud to showcase about WCMA's evolution and impact?

On the next page, list what you see in place in that ideal future. Use the questions below to prompt you.

Member Value and Engagement

- How have our members influenced our work?
- What programs, resources, or services have become indispensable to them?
- How are members connecting, collaborating, and learning from each other that feels new or inspiring?
- What have we done to help members feel more connected — to each other, to the profession, and to WCMA?

Strategic Growth and Sustainability

- What innovations have we rolled out?
- What has made that possible?
- How has the organization's growth been managed?
- Who are some key champions or guardians of our organization?
- What innovative funding sources have we tapped?
- What investments have helped WCMA flourish?

Organization Clarity and Structure

- How are we working together that's different from before?
- What roles have volunteers taken in advancing the work?
- How is information being accessed and shared?
- What technology has become most valuable to us?
- What new alliances or partnerships have emerged?
- Who's involved in our work and organization that wasn't there before?

Innovation and Impact

- What is our "edge" as an organization?
- How have we helped our members thrive and excel?
- What creative approaches have taken root?
- How have our efforts been emulated elsewhere?
- What draws people to join WCMA?

Leadership and Professional Growth

- What have we done to cultivate future leaders and ensure continuity of the profession?
- What programs or services are now signature successes?
- How has WCMA advanced the visibility of the profession?
- What's happening in regional networks that makes them thriving centers of engagement and support?
- How have the Senior Advisor roles evolved to meet member needs at all career stages?

Personal and Collective Legacy

- What stories are being told about WCMA?
- What are we hearing others say about our work?
- What are the shining demonstrations of our commitment to our members?
- What achievements are you most proud of?
- How have we positioned WCMA for the future?
- If this was an article about WCMA, what's the headline?

What do we want to see in place, 3-5 years from now, as a result of our work together?

VISION WORKSHEET

What do we see in place, 3-5 years from now, as a result of our work together?

- Add your ideas here!

The starting point for a better world is the belief that it is possible. – Margaret Mead

You need to aim beyond what you are capable of. You must develop a complete disregard for where your abilities end. Try to do things that you're incapable of. – Paul Arden

One's vision is not a road map but a compass. – Peter Block

You've got to think about big things while you're doing small things so all the small things go in the right direction. – Alvin Toffler

Use this space to brainstorm 10+ ideas. Wildly ambitious and imaginative dreams are welcome!

ROADBLOCKS WORKSHOP

***“It is difficult to take a cold and dispassionate look at our current predicament...
the first act of courage, then, is simply to see things as they are.
No excuses, no illusions of wishful progress.” – Peter Block***

We only see the future by comparing it to our current reality, and recognizing something could be better. There are reasons why we are where we are now - blocks and barriers, both internal and external, that stand like boulders in our path.

These blocks might be external, like changing societal and workforce trends, changes in policy or legislation, or funding cuts. But often they are internal: attitudes, assumptions, habits and patterns that allow problems to remain in place and quietly sabotage what we say we want. We may not even recognize the blocks impacting us because they have become so normal, unquestioned, and unconscious.

Identifying these can open windows of possibility we never recognized before and illuminate opportunities for breakthrough.

On the next page, make a list of at least 10 things that might be standing in the way of achieving the vision we outlined. Use the questions below to prompt you.

- What makes this vision **complicated**?
- What is making it **hard to achieve** this vision now?
- What could **limit our success** in the future?
- What are **external factors** that pose a challenge?
- What **issues** and **obstacles** seem to repeatedly get in our way?
- What's our role in **keeping or allowing** these blocks to stay in place?
- What self-sabotaging **habits or patterns** may undermine us?
- What **beliefs, assumptions, or attitudes** seem to keep us stuck?
- What will we have to **confront or resolve** in ourselves to move forward?

*When patterns
are broken, new
worlds emerge.
– Tuli Kupferberg*

What is blocking us from moving toward our Vision?

ROADBLOCKS DIAGNOSTIC WORKSHEET

What is blocking us from moving toward our Vision?

- Add your ideas here!

*You cannot solve a problem from the same consciousness that created it. You must learn to see the world anew.
– Albert Einstein*

We are enslaved by anything we do not consciously see. We are freed by conscious

*The greatest challenge to any thinker is stating the problem in a way that will allow a solution.
– Bertrand Russell*

Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness. – James Thurber

Everything that we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see. – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Use this space to reflect and name the blocks that are getting in our way.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS WORKSHOP

In order to break through the blocks before us and make progress toward our vision, we need to think strategically about what we do going forward. Looking back at your notes on the environmental scan, your vision, and the blocks you identified...

Where do we need to put our energy in the next 2-3 years to position us for success long term?

On the next page, list at least 10 specific, concrete actions we could take to respond to our reality, address the blocks and advance the vision.

Try to avoid general principles and think at the level of project, initiative, program, event, or activity. Start with a verb.

Use the questions below to prompt you.

- What could we do **right away** that would be a significant step toward an aspect of the vision?
- What could we do to **disrupt** one or more of the obstacles blocking us?
- What's one **obvious but important** action we need to take?
- What's a **creative, out-of-the-box** experiment could we try? Finish the sentence, "What if we just threw caution to the wind and...?!"
- What **catalytic** action could cause a domino effect and make other things more possible?
- How could we **build on what's working** and our existing strengths?
- What could we do **address a gap** or shore up a weak area?
- What interesting **opportunities** could we take advantage of?
- What might we do in the coming few years that could position us to be fully **prepared for a future threat**?
- What specific action could we take to respond proactively to **changes and trends** in our environment?
- What could we try that would build on the work **others** are doing?
- What **programs, projects, or initiatives** could we launch?
- What new **models, systems or practices** could we establish?
- What **events** could we host?
- What can **Board members** do? **Executive Board?** **Members?** **Others?** How could we tap the unique strengths and roles of each?

*Vision without
execution is
hallucination.
– Thomas Edison*

What innovative, substantial actions will deal with the roadblocks and move us toward our Vision?

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS WORKSHEET

What innovative, substantial actions will deal with the roadblocks and move us toward our Vision?

- Add your ideas here!

One's philosophy is not best expressed in words. It is expressed in the choices one makes. And the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.
– Eleanor Roosevelt

When I dare to be powerful – to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.
– Audre Lorde

If we don't change the direction we are going, we are likely to end up where we are heading.
– Chinese Proverb

Use this space to brainstorm 10+ possible strategic actions

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND THOUGHTS

Use this space to take additional notes, or jot down your thoughts throughout the retreat

- Add your notes here!

WCMA Board Retreat & Strategic Planning Launch November 4, 2025



Focus: Launching Strategic Planning

Building on our current momentum, how will we work together over the next 3-5 years to strengthen WCMA, deepen member value and connection, and ensure our long term sustainability and impact?



Retreat Work Products

- Contextual Scan
- Practical Vision
- Contradictions & Blocks

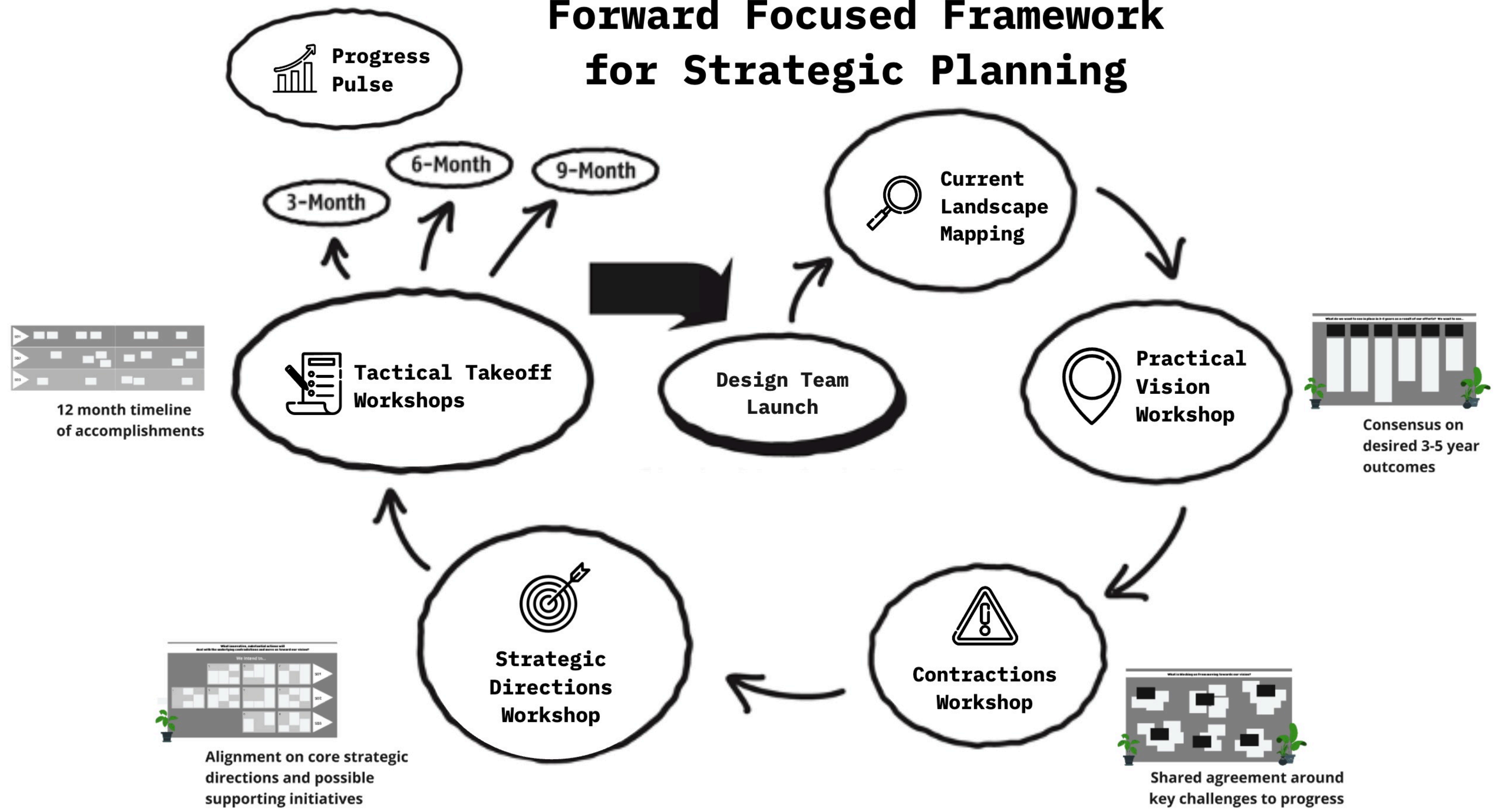
Designed & facilitated by
certified Technology of
Participation Facilitator:



Una McAlinden, CTF



Forward Focused Framework for Strategic Planning



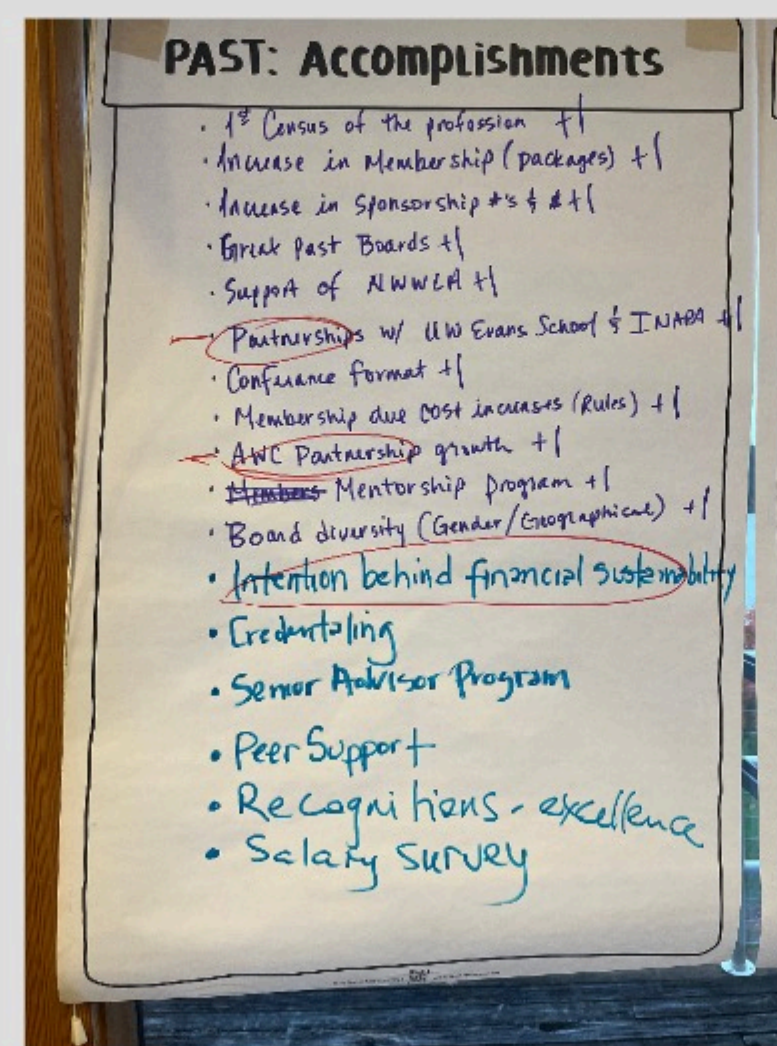
Accomplishments

What have been important milestones and results?

Describe some significant efforts of the last 5-10 years.

What are important areas of progress?

- 1st Census of the profession ★
- Increase in membership (packages) ★
- Increase in sponsorship numbers and funds ★
- Great past boards ★
- Support of NWWLA ★
- **Partnerships** with UW Evans School and INAPA ★
- Conference format ★
- Membership due cost increases (rules) ★
- **AWC Partnership** growth ★
- Mentorship program ★
- Board diversity (gender / geographical) ★
- **Intention behind financial sustainability**
- Credentialing
- Senior Advisor Program
- Peer Support
- Recognitions - excellence
- Salary survey



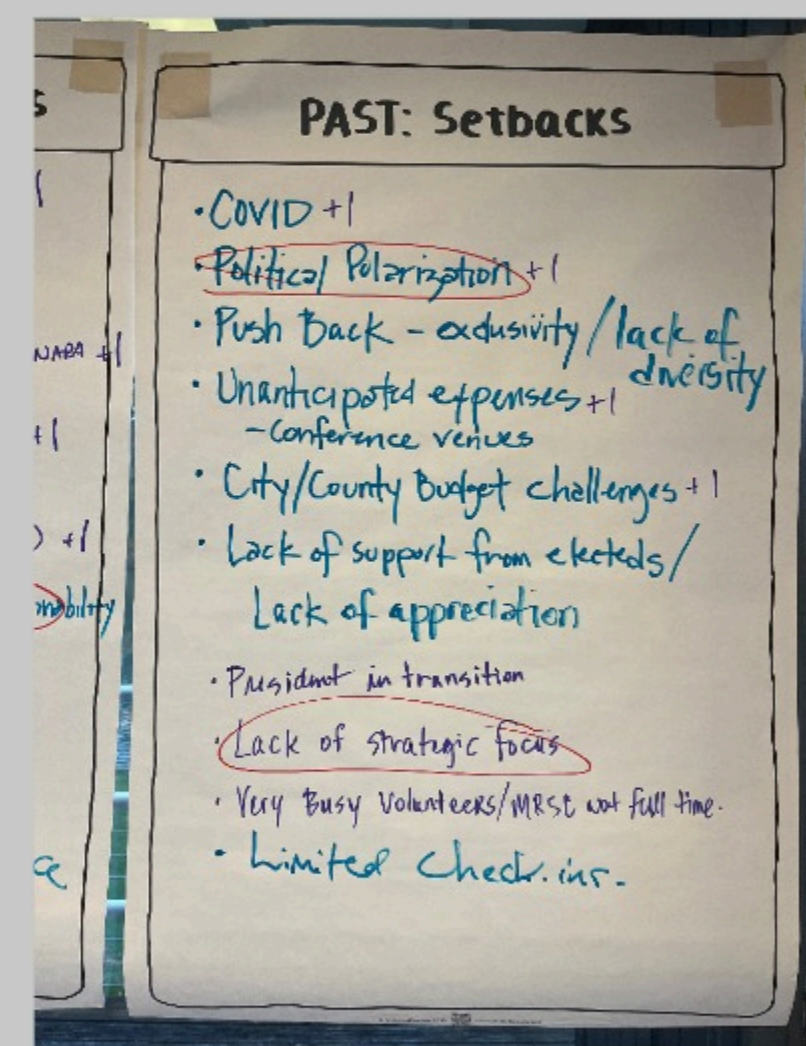
Setbacks

What events and happenings have impeded progress?

What caused us to take steps backwards?

What factors have intruded on our plans?

- COVID ★
- **Political Polarization** ★
- Push back - exclusivity / lack of diversity
- Unanticipated expenses ★
 - Conference venues
- City / County budget challenges ★
- Lack of support from elected officials
- Lack of appreciation
- President in transition
- **Lack of strategic focus**
- Very busy volunteers / MRSC not full time
- Limited check ins



PRESENT

What - from our present - can help inform our planning?

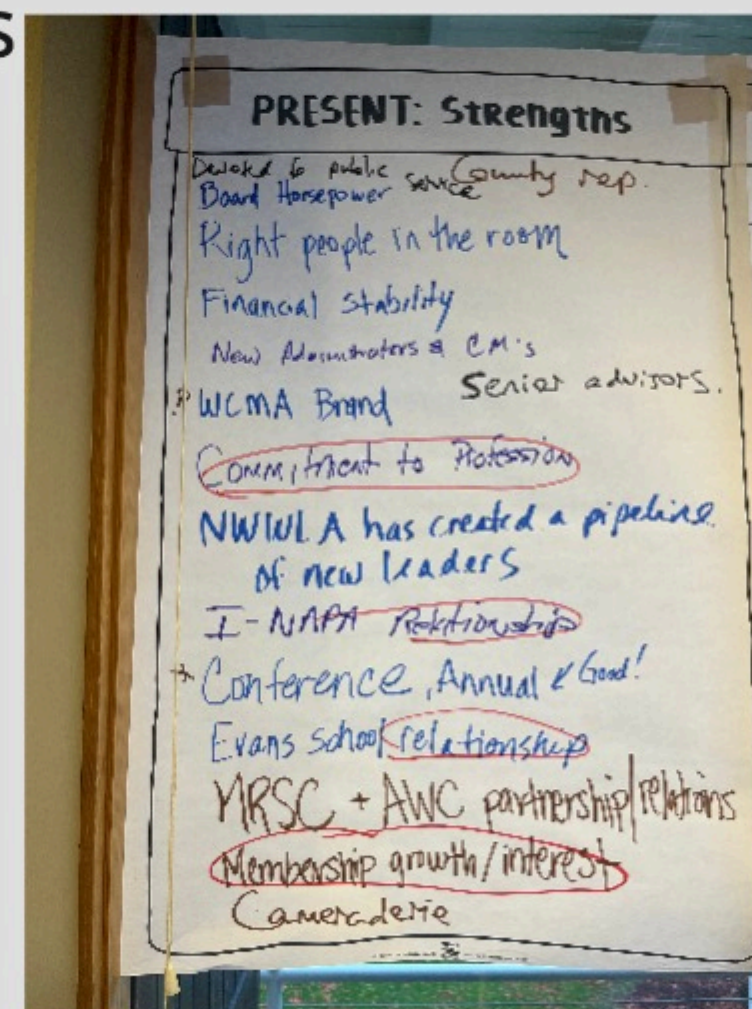
Strengths

Where do we currently have advantages?

What is contributing to momentum forward?

What have we built that we do not want to lose?

- Devoted to public service
- County representative
- Board horsepower
- Right people in the room
- Financial sustainability
- New administrators and City Managers
- WCMA Brand
- Senior advisors
- **Commitment to profession**
- NWWLA has created a pipeline of new leaders
- I-NAPA **relationship**
- Conference, annual
- Evans school **relationship**
- MRSC + AWC partnerships / relations
- **Membership growth and interest**
- Camaraderie



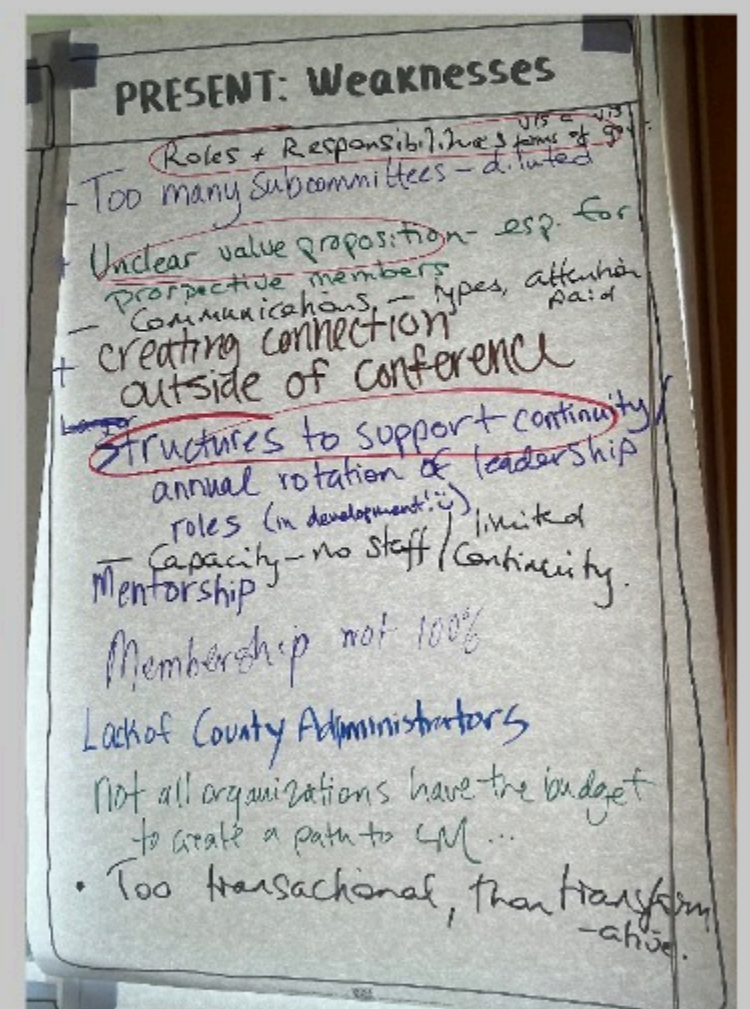
Weaknesses

What are the areas that need growth and development?

Where are there gaps in effectiveness?

What are some of the major organizational issues we need to address?

- **Roles and responsibilities**
 - vis a vis forms of government
- Too many subcommittees - diluted ★
- **Unclear value proposition** - especially for prospective members ★
- Communications - types, attention paid
- Creating connection outside of conference ★
- **Structures to support continuity** / annual rotation of leadership roles (in development)
- Capacity - no staff / limited continuity
- Mentorship
- Membership not 100%
- Lack of county administrators
- Not all organizations have the budget to create a path to City Manager
- More transactional than transformative



FUTURE

What - from our likely future - can help inform our planning?

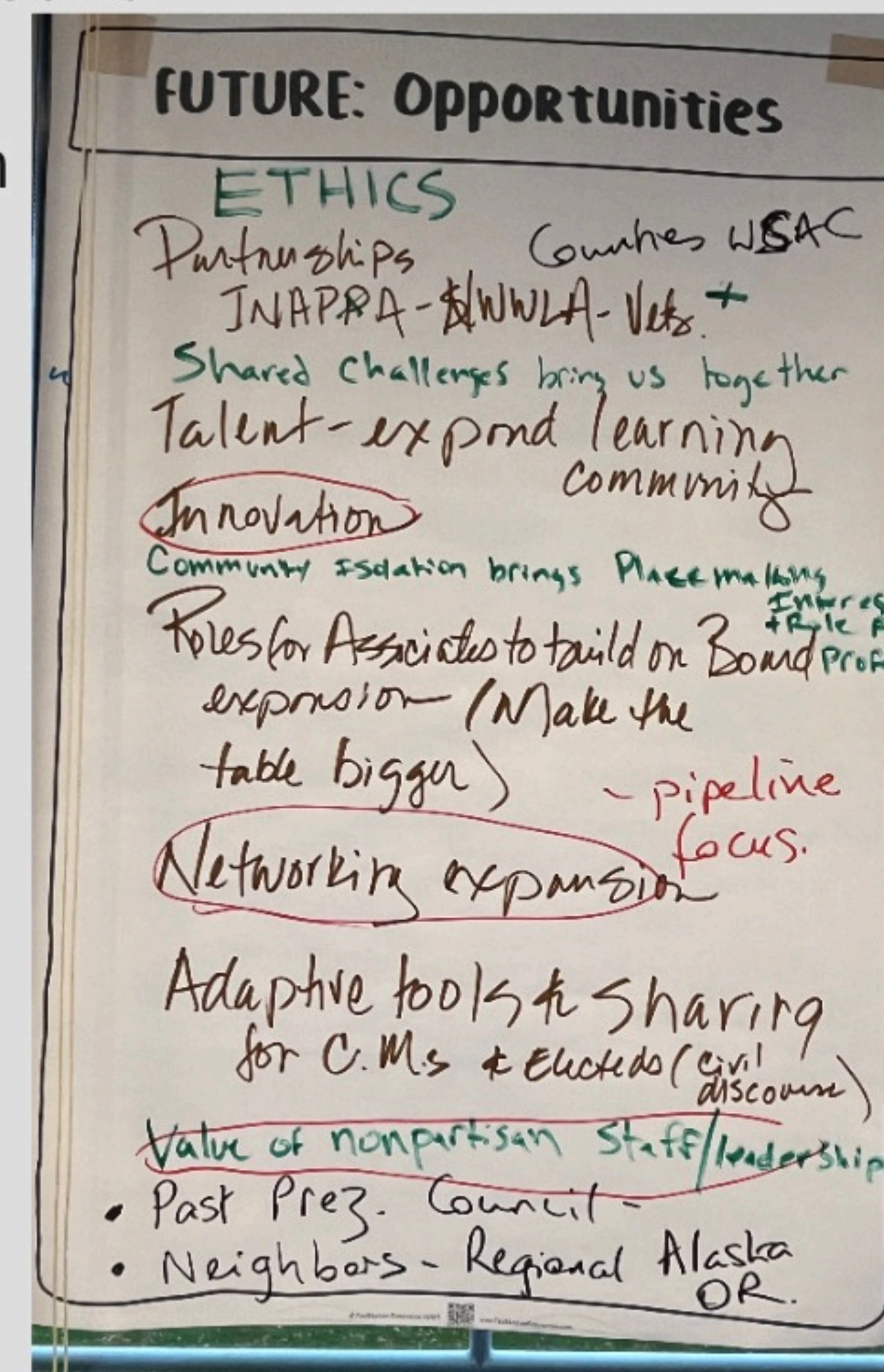
Opportunities

What forces are working for us?

What doors are open to us?

What are some ideas whose time has come?

- Ethics
- Partnerships
 - INAPA - NWWLA - Vets + Counties WSAC
- Shared challenges bring us together
- Talent - expand learning community
- **Innovation**
- Community isolation brings placemaking interest and role for profess.
- Roles for Associates to build on Board expansion (make the table bigger)
- **Networking expansion**
 - pipeline focus
- Adaptive tools & sharing for City Managers and elected officials (civil discourse)
- **Value of nonpartisan staff / leadership**
 - Past President Council
 - Neighbors - Regional, Alaska, Oregon



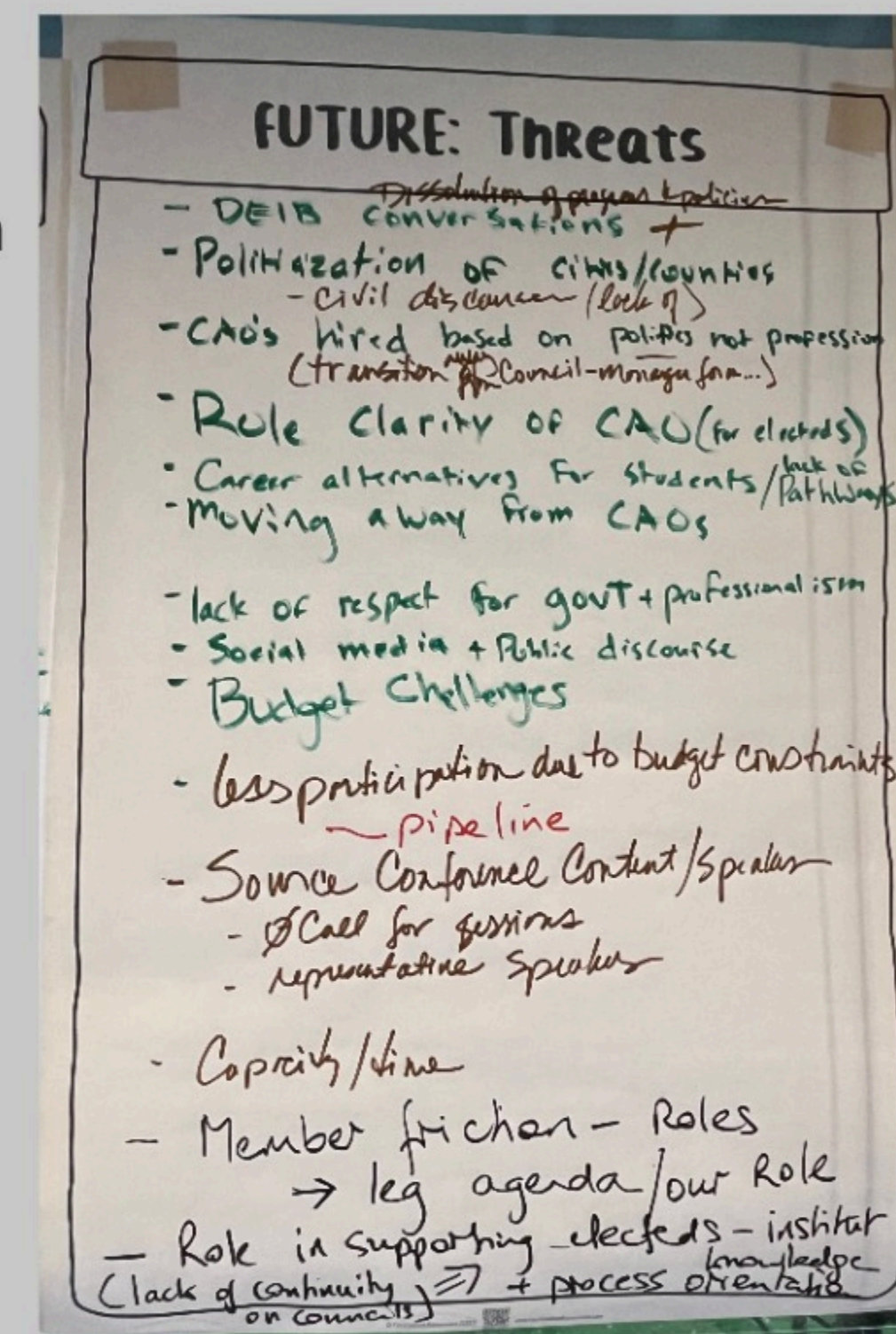
Threats

What forces are working against us?

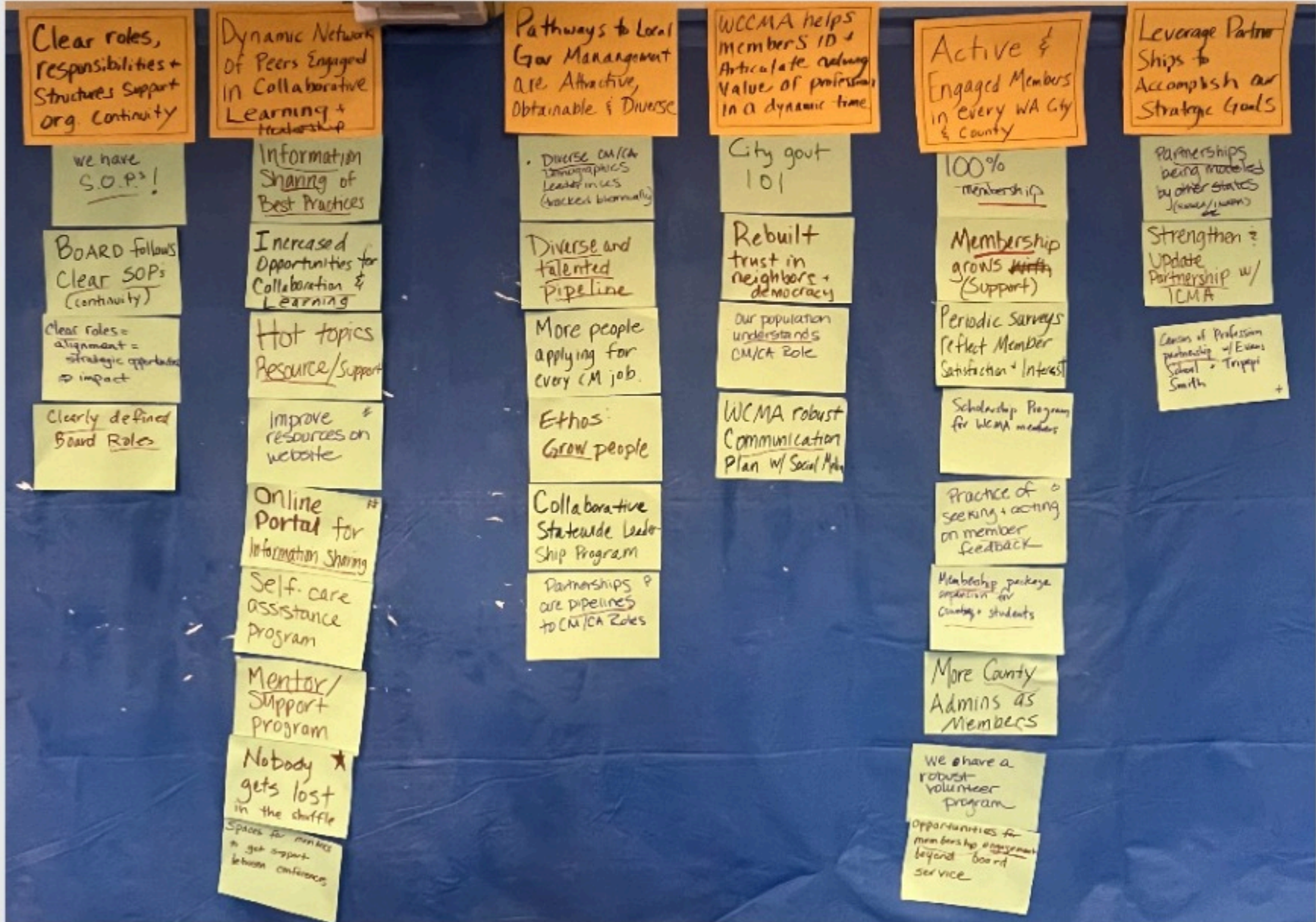
What could "blow up" if not dealt with?

What other potential dangers lurk in the future?

- DEIB conversations
- Dissolution of programs and policies
- Politicization of cities / counties
 - Civil discourse (lack of)
- CAO's hired based on politics not profession
 - Transition away from council manager form
- Role clarity of CAO (for elected officials)
- Career alternatives for students / lack of pathways
- Moving away from CAOs
- Lack of respect for government and professionalism
- Social media and public discourse
- Budget challenges
- Less participations due to budget constraints
 - Pipeline
- Source conference content / speakers
 - No call for sessions
 - Representative speakers
- Capacity / time
- Member frictions - roles
 - Leg agenda / our role
- Role in supporting elected officials
 - Institutional knowledge + process orientation
 - Lack of continuity on councils



In 3-5 years, as a result of our work, we see in place:



We are blocked from our Desired Future by ...

Limited
budget

Flat
revenues

Limited city / county
budgets, they don't
prioritise the
membership cost

Poor articulation of
value => we don't
compete well for
money

Few do most
many show up

How to create
meaningful networks
with limited time?

Volunteer based
- limited
capacity

Need time and space
to build org structures
and policies

System depends
on volunteers

Lack of capacity
to create peer
network

Clarify of
purpose and
priorities

Roles +
responsibilities
not clear

Gap in systems /
delayed
progress

No
accountability
Feedback loop

Not Forward
focus

Partner
criteria

Partnerships:
How to evaluate
shared values

Unclear path - chasing
squirrels without
systems & structure

Board unaware
of exec
decisions

Too many opportunities
for partnerships, lack of
clarity on what strategic
goals are

Too many
priorities

Clarity +
focus

It's a hard job! (Lack of
civility, attacks, bad
working conditions,
etc)

Unbalanced
focus on
negative

Pathways positive
messaging (not all
the war stories)

Isolation -
geographics + of
the roles

WA law makes it
challenging to have
"safe space" to share

Tradition &
Stereotypes

Exclusivity in
recruiting & hiring
(outdated model)

Targeted recruitment
of diverse associate
members

Outdated view of the
role & Outdated
recruiting strategies

Value is
unclear

Lack of interest
in organization

Failure to define
and / or
communicate value

Limits
membership