Toward a Vision for Minnesota: Long-Range Strategic Planning Overview and Recommendations

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1
Minnesota Statute 4A.01, Subdivision 2. Long-range plan 2
Recommendations 3
History 5
Strategic Planning Efforts by Minnesota State Departments 7
Minnesota Department of Transportation 7
Minnesota Department of Revenue 8
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency 9
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities 11
Elements of a Strategic Plan 14
Vision is the Starting Point for the Minnesota Strategic Plan 15
Developing a Vision for Minnesota 16
Characteristics of a Vision Statement 17
Virginia 17
Georgia 18
Florida 19
Starting the Process 20
Renewing the Process 22

Executive Summary

State law requires the development every five years of "an integrated long-range plan for the state based on the plans and strategies of state agencies, public advice about the future and other information."

This report, "Toward a Vision for Minnesota," is the first in a series of efforts leading to an integrated long-range strategic plan for Minnesota, Minnesota state government and the departments of state government. The report outlines an approach that, if initiated, will result in an integrated process that links department budgets, strategic goals, and tactics to achieve those goals, to an overall vision for the State of Minnesota.

The report proposes six steps for developing an integrated, long-range strategic plan for Minnesota:

- Conduct a self-critical, in-depth analysis of Minnesota's strengths and weaknesses along with opportunities and threats facing the state over the next 10 or more years
- Consider a vision statement for Minnesota based on this analysis
- Adapt the resulting vision statement to a vision statement for state government
- Align individual state agency strategic plans with the Minnesota and state government visions
- Periodically evaluate and audit progress toward achieving the overall vision and specific strategic goals
- Regularly revisit the vision and strategic goals based on audit results

The report also includes a brief history of strategic planning in Minnesota; examples of strategic planning efforts at several Minnesota state agencies and in three other states; and an overview of strategic planning and visioning.

A successful strategic planning process for Minnesota will require an ongoing commitment of elected and appointed leadership, as well as sufficient dedicated resources to initiate and maintain it.

MS 4A.01, Subd. 2.Long-range plan.

By September 15, 2010, and every five years thereafter, the commissioner must develop an integrated long-range plan for the state based upon the plans and strategies of state agencies, public advice about the future, and other information developed under this chapter. The commissioner must coordinate activities among all levels of government and must stimulate public interest and participation in the future of the state.

The commissioner must act in coordination with the commissioner of management and budget, affected state agencies, and the legislature in the planning and financing of major public programs.

Recommendations

*"It is always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look farther than you can see." — **Winston Churchill***

Six major steps are proposed to develop an integrated, long-range strategic plan for Minnesota.

Step 1: A self-critical, in-depth analysis of Minnesota's strengths and weaknesses along with the opportunities and threats facing the state over the next 10 or more years (SWOT Analysis). This step includes review and analysis of statistical trend and other factual information along with a facilitated discussion of high-level Minnesota leaders that is broadly representative of the state (government, business, labor, academia, faith community, nonprofits, ethnic communities, etc.) of the implications of the factual information. The group would be the individuals generally considered the "thought leaders" of the state, to distinguish it from a stakeholder group charged with negotiating a compromise or consensus. A facilitator could be contracted for this effort and consulted concerning the size and composition of the group.

Step 2: Utilizing this same group, develop a vision statement for Minnesota based on the analysis and discussion in the first step. Since the group would be comprised of the "thought leaders" of the state, the vision would be representative of the state population in general. The vision should be forward thinking, brief and memorable; almost a slogan. It should, however, be broad enough to incorporate a wide range of activities. The group could also identify a small number of specific statistical measures that will indicate progress towards achieving the vision. Some examples of possible vision statements include the following:

- Minnesota, the Value State

- Minnesota, the Quality State
- Minnesota, the Low-Cost State
- Minnesota, the Productivity State
- Minnesota, the State that Works

Whichever statement is selected, it must have broad buy-in, spanning partisan and philosophical divides. The first two steps should be highly focused and compact. For example, this might be a process occurring over two to three days.

Step 3: State government leaders, including at least the Governor and key legislative leaders, adapt the vision statement for Minnesota to a vision for state government in Minnesota, to identify specific overarching strategic directions, and to specify the process and timing by which each department within state government identifies its vision, mission, strategic goals and tactics for achieving those goals, and quantifiable measures of progress toward achieving the strategic goals. This leadership group should also identify an independent entity to evaluate and audit progress for each of the departments of state government.

Step 4: Each department develop its own vision, mission, strategic goals, tactics and measures of progress, which are specifically aligned with the overarching state government vision and the Minnesota vision.

Step 5: Periodically (perhaps every two or three years) evaluate progress towards achieving the overall vision and specific strategic goals. This step includes an audit of each of the prior steps and recommendations for improvement or change by an independent organization.

Step 6: Regularly revisit the vision and strategic goals based on the audit. An essential component of this step is to incorporate the views of new leaders in the state, including newly elected officials. For the process to be effective and meaningful, the vision and resulting strategic goals must have renewed buy-in by the "thought leaders" of the state. With this step, the process repeats at regular intervals. Some examples of effective strategic planning efforts have a five-year cycle while others have three-year or other cycles. The cycle period should be long enough to reflect meaningful progress, but short enough to maintain that critical buy-in by the substantial majority of the state's "thought leaders."

History

Success is 10% inspiration, 90% last-minute changes. — From a billboard advertisement

While Minnesota state government has a history of developing strategic plans for a wide variety of topical areas, from the Workforce Center Strategic Plan to the Strategic Plan for Addressing Asthma in Minnesota and the Minnesota State Parks Strategic Plan, the authors could find no history of a statewide, overarching strategic plan for the State of Minnesota. Many departments of state government have strategic plans including, for example, the Departments of Revenue, Transportation and Natural Resources and the Pollution Control Agency. However, there appears to have been little attempt to integrate these into an overarching statewide strategic plan.

Perhaps the closest attempt to develop an overarching strategic plan was in the early 1990s with Minnesota Milestones. Minnesota Milestones, using a bottom-up technique, developed a vision statement for Minnesota and measures of progress towards reaching that vision. However, Minnesota Milestones stopped short of integrating that vision and the measures of progress with specific strategies for achieving that vision.

The Minnesota Milestones vision was condensed from group interviews with thousands of Minnesotans from all corners of the state, representing diverse political views, backgrounds, ethnic origins and more. The question asked of the groups: "What do you want Minnesota to be like for your grandchildren?" The result was compiled in 1992 and consisted of five themes categorized into 19 goals.

While the Minnesota Milestones vision was inclusive, incorporating many diverse elements, its development required substantial staff resources for more than a year and resulted in a product that was not very memorable as a unifying theme for strategic planning.

The Milestones vision statement published at the time was:

> *"We Minnesotans like our state. We believe Minnesota is a good place to raise a family, go to school and enjoy life. We appreciate the natural beauty, the friendliness and sense of opportunity, the good government and the diverse economic opportunities. We believe strong values are important — spiritual values, individual responsibility, volunteering, a strong work ethic and sharing with others. We appreciate our cultural diversity. These are the personal values we cherish and want to carry forward into the next century.*

"We do not want growth and change to overpower our quality of life. We want to plan for the future. Yet we recognize that we will have to make tough choices, as we have in the past. We want to deepen the values that have guided earlier generations and made Minnesota a leader in the nation. We want to begin now to build an even better place to live, a Minnesota to pass on proudly to our children and grandchildren.

"When we talk about our hopes for the future, we share a vision with these common themes:

- *Minnesota will be a community of people who respect and care for one another.*
- *Our economic activity will create wealth and provide a good standard of living for all our people.*
- *Our citizens will be good thinkers, creative, always learning, with the skills to compete internationally.*
- *We will protect and enjoy the natural world.*
- *Our government will be responsive, effective and close to the people."*

This vision is now 18 years old and has not had explicit buy-in from leadership since the mid 1990s. The Milestones vision, though it measured progress by a series of 70 indicators, was never integrated into the budget process, or in setting strategic goals. Furthermore, the Milestones vision is for the State of Minnesota; not for Minnesota state government. These are not the same, although certainly the vision for state government should be a subset of and linked to the vision for the State of Minnesota.

Strategic planning generally has its origins in a military or business environment, while comprehensive planning is largely from the local government environment. Long-range strategic plans for states are relatively uncommon, although some states have embraced such efforts.

A substantial, professional literature exists concerning the process of planning, and a number of community, departmental and topical strategic plans have been prepared in Minnesota. Local government planning efforts include such areas as zoning and land use, urban renewal, public housing, local parks and public works. Topical planning efforts in Minnesota include strategic plans on such diverse issues as asthma, influenza prevention, water, parks and trails and others.

Examples of departmental or organizational strategic planning include several Minnesota state agencies; however, examples of state long-range strategic plans are less common. Other efforts have included components of state long-range strategic planning, but have not gone to the length of aligning all budget and departmental priorities to a strategic plan. Minnesota Milestones is an example of the latter.

Strategic Planning Efforts by Minnesota State Departments

"The whole world steps aside for the man who knows where he is going." ***— Unknown Author***

Several departments of Minnesota state government have completed planning processes and developed strategic plans for their activities. This section will review four efforts: Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Department of Revenue, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU).

Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)

MnDOT's strategic plan is online at www.dot.state.mn.us/strategicvision/vision.html

The vision for the department is succinctly stated as follows:

"Global leader in transportation, committed to upholding public needs and collaboration with internal and external partners to create a safe, efficient and sustainable transportation system for the future."

This vision and related core values and mission resulted in five strategic initiatives:

1. Safety – Promote and maintain a safe, reliable and modern transportation system
    - Reduce transportation-related fatalities and injuries through the use of new and improved technology and safety measures
    - Monitor the condition of existing infrastructure in order to maintain a reliable and efficient transportation system
2. Mobility – Improve access and enhance the movement of people and freight
    - Ease congestion, reduce commute times and improve the quality of life and economic well-being of all Minnesotans
    - Promote mass transit and use all modes for improving mobility and accessibility in the Metro and in Greater Minnesota
    - Maximize operational efficiency of Interregional Corridors
3. Innovation – Promote a culture of innovation in the organization

- Foster innovation and collaborative partnerships within the transportation community in delivering 21st century transportation solutions
- Develop ground-breaking, multi-modal transportation practices that will accommodate the diverse needs of all individuals and communities
- Encourage research and build capacity to develop, implement and sustain solutions that balance preservation needs and address congestion issues

4. Leadership – Become the transportation leader and employer of choice for Minnesota's diverse population

   - Mobilize in-house talent, public input and external partnerships to deliver value to the public
   - Value service, excellence and diversity to be an employer of choice
   - Provide development and advancement opportunities for all employees
   - Empower all employees to be leaders and ambassadors for Mn/DOT

5. Transparency – Build public trust in Mn/DOT

   - Develop a simple, yet comprehensive tool for measuring performance across functions that is efficient, accurate, cost effective and will show accountability to the public
   - Build relationships within local communities and encourage public involvement in developing transportation solutions
   - Effectively tie the strategic vision to Mn/DOT's long-range transportation plan, strategic plan and investment objectives; serving as an ethical compass for decision making at all levels

Minnesota Department of Revenue

The strategic plan for the Department of Revenue is online at http://taxes.state.mn.us/other_supporting_content/Documents/strategic_plan.pdf

The vision statement for the department consists of six items which can be summarized as fairness, accuracy and security.

Vision

- Everyone pays the right amount: no more, no less.
- Citizens receive the services and information they need to meet their tax obligations and understand the revenue system.

- Payment and refund systems are secure, fast, convenient, easy to use and accurate.
- The revenue system keeps pace with changes in the economy and technology.
- Employees perform meaningful and challenging work, and have opportunities to learn and grow.
- Taxpayers trust us to protect their data

Strategies

- We will identify and address patterns of noncompliance.
- We will work to ensure that all citizens receive the best possible services and information.
- We will deploy systems and processes that help us keep pace with taxpayer and employee needs and expectations.
- We will identify and recommend changes to align the revenue system with economic activity.
- We will provide a flexible, supportive and rewarding environment for our workforce.
- We will ensure that our systems and practices protect the privacy and security of taxpayers.
- We will identify and adapt to changes in technology, the economy and demographic trends.
- We will identify benchmarks to measure our success when setting goals and making decisions.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)

The MPCA strategic plan is online at www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/about-mpca/mpca-overview/agency-strategy/mpca-strategic-plan.html. The vision consists of five components encompassing air, water and land, as well as the general environment and department operations.

MPCA Vision:

- Minnesotans take responsibility to protect our environment
- Minnesota's air is clean and clear
- Minnesota's land supports healthy ecosystems and sustainable land uses
- Minnesota has clean, sustainable surface and ground water
- Excellence in operations

The strategic plan was revised in 2008. It does not contain much information about the strategies used to accomplish the goals and objectives. These strategies are spelled out in annual work planning efforts.

The revised plan includes three additional strategic goals:

1. An increased focus on addressing the challenges of global climate change through efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
2. A new goal to build on the state's capacity to address emerging environmental issues, such as endocrine disrupting compounds and nanotechnology.
3. Changes in the agency's goals that focus on creating sustainable behaviors and processes to encourage conservation of resources and a healthy environment.

The MPCA's more detailed strategic goals are:

Vision: Minnesotans take responsibility to protect our environment

Specific goals to help reach this vision include:

- Minnesotans buy green products and services.
- Minnesota businesses produce green products and provide green services by reducing or eliminating the use of environmentally harmful substances.
- Minnesotans act on their environmental knowledge to support healthy ecosystems.
- MPCA leads the way to minimize its environmental footprint and assist other public entities to do the same.

Vision: Minnesota's air is clean and clear

Specific goals in this section include:

- Minnesota's outdoor air will meet or improve upon all environmental and human health-related federal and state ambient air quality standards.
- Minnesota's outdoor air quality will meet environmental and human health benchmarks for toxic and other air pollutants.
- Minnesota reduces its contribution to regional, national and global air pollution.

Vision: Minnesota's land supports healthy ecosystems and sustainable land uses

Goals in this section include:

- Ensuring solid waste is managed to conserve materials, resources and energy.
- Minimizing or reducing the release of contaminants to or from the land.
- Restoring land to productive use by managing risk from contaminated sites.

Vision: Minnesota has clean, sustainable surface and ground water

Specific goals to help reach this vision include:

- Assessing the condition of Minnesota's ground water systems and providing information on the effectiveness of best management practices in preventing and reducing degradation of ground water and supporting ground water conservation.
- Assessing the chemical, physical and biological integrity of Minnesota's lakes, streams and wetlands to identify if designated uses are being met, and providing information on the condition of waters.
- Protecting and improving the chemical, physical and biological integrity of Minnesota's lakes, streams and wetlands.

Vision: Excellence in operations

Specific goals include:

- Providing a safe and healthy workplace for all employees, volunteers and visitors.
- Managing agency operations to support the agency's environmental work and core operations in effective and efficient manner.
- Achieving excellence through application of appropriate tools and best practices.
- Providing a reliable information management system that supports the agency and its partners in effective and efficient environmental work.
- Maintaining the agency's capacity to recognize and address emerging issues that fall within the agency's authority.

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU)

The MnSCU strategic plan is online at
www.mnscu.edu/media/publications/pdf/strategicplan_2008-12.pdf

MnSCU's vision is succinctly stated:

Vision

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities will enable the people of Minnesota to succeed by providing the most accessible, highest value education in the nation.

Mission

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system of distinct and collaborative institutions offers higher education that meets the personal and career goals of a wide range of individual learners, enhances the quality of life for all Minnesotans and sustains vibrant economies throughout the state.—Adopted 2006 by the Board of Trustees—Revisions adopted March 2008 by the Board of Trustees.

MnSCU then identified four strategic goals

Strategic Directions and Goals Summary

Strategic Direction 1: Increase access and opportunity

Goal 1.1 – Raise Minnesota's participation and achievement in post-secondary education by meeting the needs of students with diverse backgrounds and educational goals.

Goal 1.2 – Work with other organizations to prepare all young people to graduate from high school and enroll in college prepared for college-level work.

Goal 1.3 – Maintain an affordable cost of attendance for Minnesota residents.

Strategic Direction 2: Promote and measure high-quality learning programs and services

Goal 2.1 – Promote accountability for results through a system of accessible reports to the public and other stakeholders.

Goal 2.2 – Produce graduates who have strong, adaptable and flexible skills.

Goal 2.3 – Provide multiple delivery options for educational programs and student services.

Strategic Direction 3: Provide programs and services that enhance the economic competitiveness of the state and its regions

Goal 3.1 – Be the state's leader in identifying workforce education and training opportunities and seizing them.

Goal 3.2 – Support regional vitality by contributing artistic, cultural and civic assets that attract employees and other residents seeking a high quality of life.

Goal 3.3 – Develop each institution's capacity to be engaged in and add value to its region and meet the needs of employers in its region.

Strategic Direction 4: Innovate to meet current and future educational needs

Goal 4.1 – Build organizational capacity for change to meet future challenges and remove barriers to innovation and responsiveness.

Goal 4.2 – Reward and support institutions, administrators, faculty and staff for innovations that advance excellence and efficiency.

Goal 4.3 – Hire and develop leaders who will initiate and support innovation throughout the system.

Elements of a Strategic Plan

*"If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else." — **Laurence J. Peter**, US educator and writer (1919-1988)*

Strategic planning is an organization's process of defining its strategy, or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy, including its capital and people. It includes four basic elements.

1. **Vision:** Defines the desired or intended future state of an organization or enterprise in terms of its fundamental objective and/or strategic direction. Vision is a long term view, sometimes describing how the organization would like the world in which it operates to be: "What do we want to be?"
2. **Mission:** Defines the fundamental purpose of an organization or an enterprise, succinctly describing why it exists and what it does to achieve its Vision. A mission statement provides details of what is done and answers the question: "What do we do?"
3. **Goals:** Once the vision is established, goals should be identified. For example, the original Minnesota Milestones identified a strong economy as a major focus of the vision. The five specific goals identified to achieve that were:
    - Minnesota will have sustainable, strong economic growth.
    - Minnesota's workforce will have the education and training to make the state a leader in the global economy.
    - All Minnesotans will have the economic means to maintain a reasonable standard of living.
    - All Minnesotans will have decent, safe and affordable housing.
    - Rural areas, small cities and urban neighborhoods throughout the state will be economically viable places for people to live and work.
4. **Strategies:** These are the plan of action designed to achieve the goals. The strategies should include an element of time horizon. For example, the goal for "All Minnesotans will have decent, safe and affordable housing" might include a strategy to rehabilitate existing housing to provide transitional living quarters for the homeless and include incentives to encourage the homeless to move to those facilities by 2015. A strategy might also include efforts to prevent conditions that lead to homelessness.

Vision is the Starting Point for the Minnesota Strategic Plan

*"Where there is no vision, people perish." — **Proverbs 29:18***

Perhaps the first requirement of a long-range plan is to establish a vision for the future. Before Minnesota can decide on strategies for the future, it must establish direction and achieve buy-in for that vision for the future.

A critical question for a strategic plan for Minnesota is whether the plan is for Minnesota or state government in Minnesota. Since state government exists to serve the citizens of Minnesota, logically, some elements of a plan for Minnesota need to exist before developing a plan for state government in Minnesota. A vision for Minnesota is probably the most critical first element.

Minnesota Milestones attempted to identify a vision for the State of Minnesota, not just for state government in Minnesota. With a vision established for the State of Minnesota, the vision, mission, goals and strategies for state government in Minnesota would logically follow and be integrated with the overall state vision.

Criticisms of the Minnesota Milestones vision are:

1. It was too complex, incorporating elements of goals in the vision statement. A vision statement should be short and memorable
2. It was not integrated with strategies for achieving the vision
3. It did not recognize that state government, along with other actors, including private for-profits organizations, private not-for-profit organizations, higher education, other levels of government and other organizations play essential and distinct roles but must be integrated to achieve the vision for the state.
4. It did not recognize the need for regular renewal of buy-in by key leaders.

Developing a Vision for Minnesota

Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare. — ***Japanese Proverb***

What should the vision statement be in reference to? Who should be involved in developing the vision statement? How often should it be revisited or revised?

MS 4A.01, Subd. 2 calls for an "integrated long-range plan for the state" of Minnesota – not just for state government in Minnesota. This suggests the development of a vision statement and related plan for the State of Minnesota, with state government linking its vision and strategic goals to the overall vision for the state. Each department within state government would then link its plan to this overall vision and strategic goals.

A vision statement, to be useful, needs buy-in from state leadership, as well as the general public, and be regularly revisited. The vision statement provides the concept of the general destination or direction against which all other elements of the plan must be aligned. Metaphorically, the vision is where we want to go, our destination, and the remainder of the plan is a statement about an efficient and effective combination of roads and highways that will allow us to arrive at our destination.

First and foremost, a vision for the State of Minnesota must be memorable and provide a general guide for strategic initiatives. For example, the Enterprise Florida Board vision for the state is "Leadership in the Global Innovation Economy," Oregon's vision is, "Competitiveness through Economic Social and Environmental Well-Being."

A vision should be rich enough to address major aspects of the state and serve as a rallying flag and focus for strategic initiatives. For example, a vision statement should be relevant to the physical environment, social and community relations, business, and the economy. It should be developed with some awareness of the global, technical, economic and physical climate of the future.

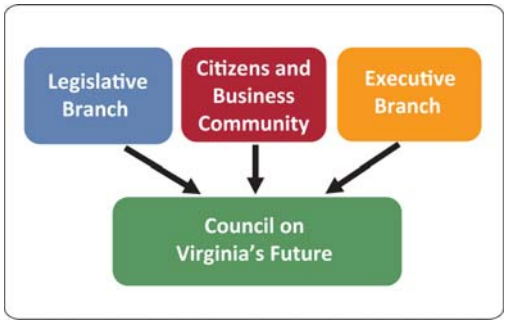
Any vision statement for the state should also include a vision for the role of state government, relative to other sectors of the economy, in achieving the overall vision for the state.

Characteristics of a Vision Statement

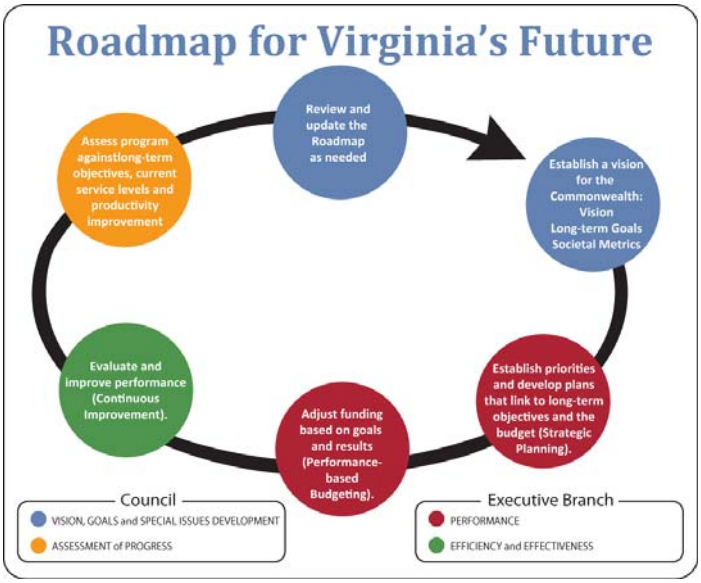
*"It is a terrible thing to see and have no vision." — **Helen Keller***

Two general approaches toward developing a vision are bottom-up and top-down. Minnesota Milestones was an example of a primarily bottom up approach where thousands of Minnesotans were interviewed in group settings and the commonalities were identified across hundreds of groups. The comments from these group interviews were organized into a single, cohesive statement by staff of the State Planning Agency. While this yields a vision that is shared by a wide cross-section of the state's population, this approach is time-consuming, expensive and difficult to revisit on a regular basis. Indeed, the Minnesota Milestones vision has not been revisited since its development nearly two decades ago.

An alternative is a primarily top-down vision statement. In Virginia, the Council on Virginia's Future was established by statute (http://future.virginia.gov/council.php).



The Council includes the governor (chair), nine majority and minority leaders of the two legislative bodies, eight citizen and business representatives, and the commissioner of finance for a total of 17 members. One of their charges is to agree on a vision for Virginia's future beginning in January 2004 and revisit the vision every two years after. They are further charged with identifying goals resulting from this vision, aligning state government activities and budget to the goals, and identifying measures of progress toward the goals. The following graphics further illustrate Virginia's approach:



The Virginia vision as stated in their 2009 report is:

Responsible Economic Growth
Enviable Quality of Life
Educated Citizens Prepared for a Successful Life
Best-Managed State Government
Informed and Engaged Citizens Helping to Shape the Commonwealth's Future

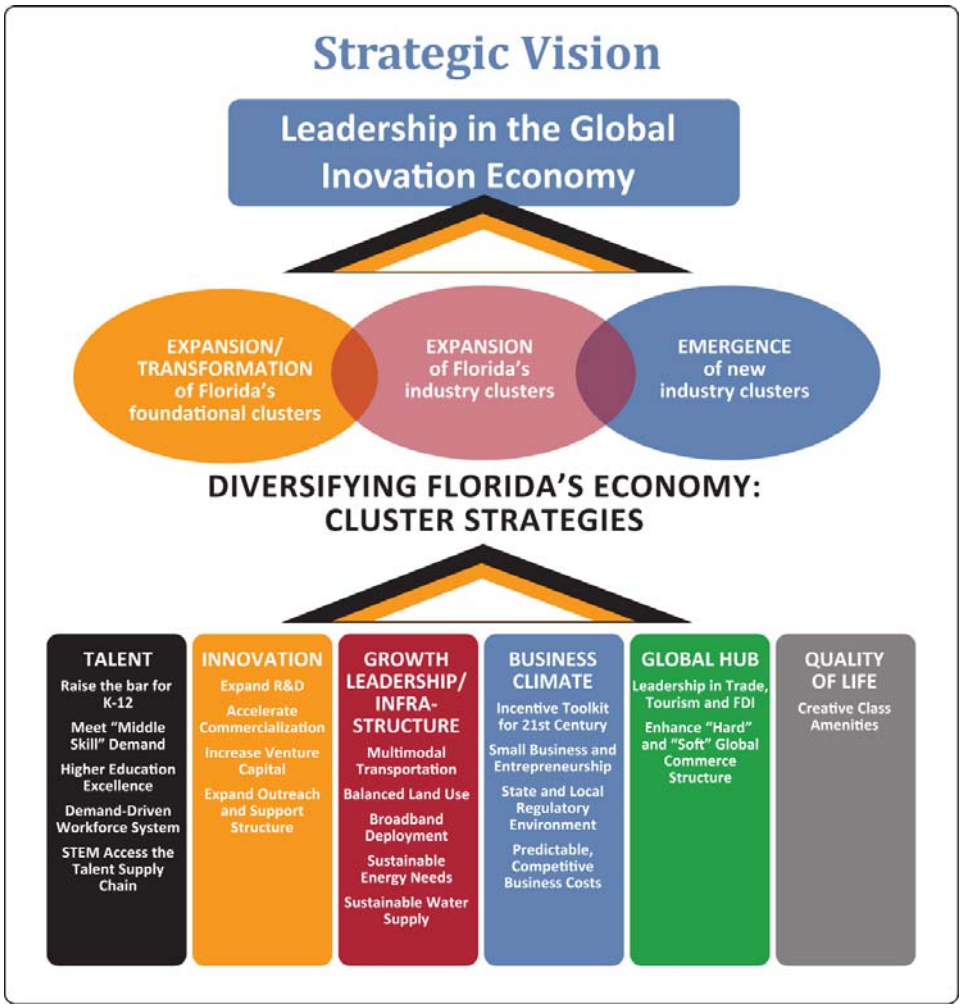
This vision statement, including five basic concepts, represents laudable and important goals but would be difficult to remember and lacks focus because it incorporates six different action words: responsible, enviable, successful, best-managed, informed, and engaged.

The vision statement for Georgia (see illustration below) focuses on state government. It focuses on process, not outcomes. The "Results for Georgians" statement is more of a vision with the four action words of educated, healthy, safe and growing. The two statements do not seem reconciled.

The Florida vision statement ("Leadership in the Global Innovation Economy") is more focused and easier to remember and can be directly related to strategies over a wide range of potential strategic initiatives.

The Enterprise Florida Board was created by the legislature, with input from legislators and the governor. It features a long-term vision and 5-year plan; refreshes every three years, and is updated annually. The strategic vision, illustrated below, is aligned with efforts of the Florida Chamber of Commerce.

The Florida vision for leadership in the global innovation economy is supported with an over-arching strategy of focusing on diversifying Florida's economy. To accomplish this, Florida identified six strategic priorities, including building its talent pool, encouraging innovation, developing its appropriate infrastructure, improving its business climate, developing its role as a global hub, and improving quality of life. Enterprise Florida also maintains statistical measures of progress towards their goals.



Starting the Process

"It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit." ***— President Harry S. Truman***

Work prior to agreeing on a vision includes a statistical and qualitative evaluation of Minnesota's strengths and weaknesses and an identification of potential threats and opportunities (SWOT analysis) or similar type of evaluation analysis. Brutal honesty and self-reflection are essential to this evaluation.

For example, weaknesses might include some things that can't be changed, such as average January temperature and physical location relative to major transportation routes. It might also include an analysis of relative tax rates and their impact and other issues related to business climate. Strengths might include Minnesota's relatively high level of educational attainment, growth of personal income faster than the nation, traditional work ethic, availability of fresh water, forest resources, fertile land supply and other potential strengths. The willingness of leaders to work together to solve problems and the willingness of the general population to volunteer for essential tasks (for example, people working together to protect their city against a flood) should also be part of this evaluation.

Evaluation of opportunities and threats are more forward looking and imply a time horizon of 10 or more years. Some threats include rising health care costs, increasing demands on government services, slower economic growth, job skills mismatches, water supply overuse, pollution, crop diseases such as wheat rust, and more. Opportunities include increases in the number of people with time to volunteer (the increasing number of retirees), relatively larger supplies of fresh water than some areas of the country and world, high tech developments and robotics, health care discoveries, a workforce able to respond to new technologies, etc.

The SWOT analysis should be performed in a focused, facilitated meeting with Minnesota's "thought leaders." Statistical analysis of critical trends should be prepared in advance as briefing material. The people who prepare the briefing materials should also be available during the discussions in the event that additional materials or data are desired.

The outcome of this process is an honest and complete evaluation of the current conditions of Minnesota and the major issues facing the state. The participants don't necessarily need to agree on how to respond to the strengths and weaknesses of the state but they need to identify them.

These same participants will then be called on to agree on a vision for the state. This must also be a focused, facilitated discussion resulting in a brief statement of direction for the state.

Discussions of how to deal with the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats and how to achieve the vision come later with the identification of strategies. The order in which this is accomplished is essential. Minnesota needs to know where it is going before beginning discussion on how to get there.

Renewing the Process

*"Map out your future, but do it in pencil." — **Jon Bon Jovi***

Regular tracking and measurement of progress toward meeting strategic goals is essential to understanding whether there is progress. Minnesota Milestones is largely remembered for its 70-indicator list of measures of progress.

While 70 indicators certainly covered the waterfront of the vision, it may have been too many to be functionally useful and adequately maintain. Other, similar efforts tend to have substantially fewer indicators, often in the 10- to 20-indicator range.

The tracking and measurement of progress may also be necessary at two levels. First is a tracking of overall progress of the state of Minnesota. For example, an indicator might be per capita personal income relative to the nation. Is Minnesota's income growing faster or slower than the nation?

In addition, state government might also want to monitor its progress. For example, the state might want to monitor the price of government, expressed as government revenues as a percent of total personal income and disposable personal income per capita (after-tax income) as a percent of national disposable per capita income. These measures would yield a sense of whether government revenues are rising faster or slower than the overall economy and whether after-tax income per capita is increasing faster or slower than the nation.

Selection of the specific measures should be made with forethought on the degree to which they measure effective progress towards the vision. A team of dedicated staff should be designated to continuously monitor and update these indicators.