

achieve those objectives are seen in the context of the resources and constraints presented by the organization's environment."⁵ Strategic planning involves the following specific, sequential stages of action:

1. Identify the mission of the organization.
2. Establish a set of goals and priorities to be achieved.
3. Assess the organization's environment, including the individuals and groups whose support will be crucial.
4. Develop a set of measurable objectives for goal attainment.
5. Devise various strategies or action plans for achieving the objectives.
6. Agree on a timetable for implementation.
7. Create an information system to monitor and evaluate progress.⁶

These steps are quite similar to those enumerated earlier in outlining the rational-comprehensive approach to decision making, but several points should be made about strategic planning specifically. Disagreement exists about how the process should take place. Public administration specialist Robert Denhardt thinks most cities lack sufficient internal expertise to conduct strategic planning without help, and so he suggests bringing in an outside consultant.⁷ Others agree, noting that local government officials should not make a large investment in the technique unless they have sophisticated managerial capabilities.⁸ Denhardt also favors creating a planning group of some sort to carry out the process. Depending on the scope of the goals being considered, this group might be composed of high-level city staff or it might extend beyond city government to include representatives of business, finance, labor, and neighborhood associations. Todd Swanstrom echoes this inclusive approach.⁹ Lamenting the elitist/technical nature of a process that often produces an economic growth bias, Swanstrom argues that strategic planning should not overlook the values of democratic participation and the need for checks and balances. Furthermore, in the public sector, one cannot forget politics. Indeed, political scientist John Gargan insists that planning proposals must be "technically feasible, fiscally feasible, and politically feasible."¹⁰ Since strategic planning ultimately involves value judgments about the use of scarce resources, some disagreement, conflict, and political battles may be unavoidable, and the best-laid plans may never become reality. Research suggests that one of the best predictors of the presence of conflict (and cooperation) in decision making is the form of government used in a city (see Box 6.1).

How many cities develop strategic plans? A 2009 International City/County Management Association (ICMA) survey that included 2,214 U.S. cities with 2,500 or more people (a 26 percent response rate), found, surprisingly, that only 62 percent of the localities reported having a strategic or long-range plan.¹¹ As one might assume, as the population size of the city decreases, the propensity to develop a strategic plan also decreases. Ninety-four percent of municipalities with 500,000 to one million residents had a strategic plan; the statistic for cities sized 250,000 to 499,999 people was 86 percent. Among the 80 Mid-Atlantic cities, only 38 percent of the jurisdictions had created a strategic plan. For the