

IN THE SERVICE OF HIS DIVINE GRACE A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI PRABHUPADA

Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

THE GBC'S STRATEGIC PLAN

A COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY

OUR SERVICE

Every day, ISKCON members throughout the world actively respond to people's needs with the timeless spiritual science of Krishna consciousness, making it possible for thousands of people to find sustained happiness. Working through ISKCON's network of temples, centers, and home-based efforts, devotees strive to fulfill the mission given to them by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in the founding document of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness:

To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all peoples in the techniques of spiritual life, in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.

Srila Prabhupada established the Governing Body Commission (GBC) to serve ISKCON in achieving these ends by providing leadership and governance, establishing global policies, and developing strategies for the sustained growth of the Krishna consciousness movement. And, as Srila Prabhupada requested, the GBC serves as ISKCON's ultimate managerial authority.

The GBC, of course, cannot work in isolation; rather, it needs extensive collaboration with ISKCON members and projects throughout the world. Aside from the obvious need for this collaboration, the GBC is driven by one of Srila Prabhupada's last requests: that we show our love for him by cooperating to serve him.

A GROWING NEED

The challenges and opportunities of our times call for both dynamic visionary planning and the effective execution of those plans. ISKCON is growing, and with it, the need for better social support, leadership, and global coordination.

The GBC, aided by a dedicated Strategic Planning Team (SPT), has increased its attempts to address these needs – first by identifying some of the ways ISKCON needs support in its growth, and then by developing practical strategies to offer that support. Carrying out these strategies will allow the members of the GBC to underscore Srila Prabhupada's vision for ISKCON as a cooperative society that recognizes unity in diversity, maintains Vaisnava behavior and high spiritual standards, works on both love and trust and sound organizational principles, and encourages a broad and active participation among its members.

As ISKCON embraces Srila Prabhupada’s vision and learns how to better implement it worldwide, we will find ourselves able to reach people from any background and nurture their spiritual advancement and happiness as well as the advancement and happiness of our own members.

THE STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The GBC’s strategic planning focuses on a set of broad initiatives that have been fleshed out with specific goals and action points. These concerns or areas of effort fit together like pieces of a puzzle; assembled they form a powerful and comprehensive beginning plan for the future of the Krishna consciousness movement. While these initiatives are the starting points, other areas soon need to be added, such as initiatives focusing specifically on education. The current broad categories are:

- Strengthening Our Foundations
- Building Capacity for Leadership
- Expanding Outreach
- Devotee Care
- Bringing the Plan Into the World of Action

Each of these areas is described below, and each is to be supported by an ISKCON culture that embraces Srila Prabhupada’s focus on results, compassion, enthusiasm, kindness, and drive.

STRENGTHENING OUR FOUNDATIONS

As ISKCON has grown, our mettle has been tested in implementing the instructions Srila Prabhupada gave us. To address both the immediate and long-term needs these challenges have raised, the GBC is working to apply the principles in ISKCON’s founding documents and Srila Prabhupada’s other directives, and to enhance ISKCON’s internal culture of cooperative service.

Through global collaboration and discussion with a number of ISKCON members, led by GBC committees, several important documents have been or are in the process of being created. Here is a sampling of the ongoing work:

THE ISKCON CONSTITUTION

Not long after forming ISKCON Srila Prabhupada asked his disciples to begin work on its constitution. The constitution is mentioned as early as 1968. In 1971 he wrote, “We are in the experimental stage, but in the next meeting of the GBC members they should form a constitution how the GBC members manage the whole affair.”

Srila Prabhupada gave us a number of principles on which he wanted the organization and operations of ISKCON based. The ISKCON Constitution is meant to clarify and enshrine these principles in a document that will serve present and future generations of devotees, helping to ensure both the success of our mission and faithfulness to our Founder-Acarya.

SRILA PRABHUPADA'S POSITION

ISKCON is unified by the paramount position His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada holds as our Founder-Acarya. As we wish to succeed as a Society, all ISKCON members must continue to deepen their understanding of and fidelity to their relationship with Srila Prabhupada and his mission, vision, instructions, and the overall guiding principles on which he founded ISKCON.

PARALLEL LINES OF AUTHORITY AND ECONOMY

One of ISKCON's unique challenges is to maintain clear lines of organizational authority without unnecessarily inhibiting the spiritual dynamics of the guru-disciple relationship in a Society with multiple types of spiritual leaders. It's important to establish policies and standards that will best address this challenge.

ISKCON CULTURE

In the course of its history, our Society has naturally developed its own culture of beliefs, behaviors, norms, priorities, standards, and assumptions. On the whole, ISKCON's culture embodies many spiritually positive elements – a strong dedication to the sadhana Srila Prabhupada assigned us, for example, and a loyalty to what he taught. But there are negative aspects of ISKCON's developing culture too – aspects that do not support ISKCON's overall mission, such as a feeling of disempowerment among the devotees and a lessening of participation in the Society's aims. In addition, some of the cultural elements Srila Prabhupada personally introduced have been de-emphasized, such as his focus on achieving transcendental results both in individual practice and the preaching mission. So part of planning for ISKCON's future is to explore our culture and identify and manage both its positive and negative elements.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR LEADERSHIP

The GBC is responsible for providing effective global leadership to an increasingly diverse and expansive Society. Therefore it is vital we strengthen and build ISKCON's capacity for leadership through team-building, identifying and training future leaders, and refining and enhancing ISKCON's organizational development.

TEAM-BUILDING

As the ultimate managerial authority for ISKCON, the GBC needs the leadership and organizational acumen to serve a worldwide movement – and it needs to work as a team. So team-building is one of the most crucial elements of the GBC's leadership mandates. As the GBC improves the teamwork among its own members, it then needs to create connecting points with the rest of the Society. The GBC cannot operate in a vacuum. As Srila Prabhupada wrote in a letter dated October 18, 1973, "Material nature means dissension and disagreement, especially in this Kali-yuga. But for this Krishna consciousness movement, its success will depend on agreement, even though there are varieties of engagements."

SUCCESSION

While considering their future, most organizations search out people who appear to have the capacity and dedication to lead the organization forward. Current leaders seek out those who are successful in their particular fields and nurture their growth as leaders by training and encouraging them. Leaders in

the fields of itinerant and congregational preaching, project leaders, temple presidents, and devotees whose specific service it is to care for others – all these persons require good Vaisnava association, training, spiritual support, and opportunities to develop their experience. They also need a thorough grounding in the movement’s history and the details of Srila Prabhupada’s legacy so their leadership capacity and integrity as Srila Prabhupada’s followers becomes solid. Some of these devotees, after many years of demonstrating that integrity and a strong record of accomplishment in caring for devotees and outreach, may be ready to serve as members of the GBC. It is vital for the continuity of the GBC body that we identify and help those who will develop the spiritual stature and executive competence required for this responsibility.

GBC ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Srila Prabhupada designed the GBC’s current leadership model at a time when the movement was smaller and less complex than it is today. The GBC will thoroughly review that model and, while remaining loyal to Srila Prabhupada’s directions, implement any necessary structural developments and enhancements in order to meet the needs of an expanding movement.

This initiative addresses

- GBC members’ duties, responsibilities, performance, and accountability
- Systems – how the GBC functions and how it interfaces with the rest of ISKCON
- The GBC’s financial requirements

ORGANIZATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING

Local and regional ISKCON projects are often so busy with day-to-day activities that they do not have the time or resources to analyze their own organization or the environment in which they serve. For example, are the systems in place in a project that allow that project to function at its best? Are individual ISKCON projects aware of – and therefore capable of catering to – what’s going on in the preaching field around them? Srila Prabhupada himself conducted an environmental scan when he was still living on the Bowery in New York City by visiting Mukunda and Janaki, two of his first disciples, to ask questions about American life and culture. It’s just helpful when planning for a temple’s (or ISKCON’s) future to make this kind of analysis.

The organizational scan allows the GBC to study ISKCON as a whole. Organizational scanning includes

- Identifying ISKCON’s officers and staff
- Taking a census of initiated devotees
- Identifying ISKCON’s properties and assessing how well they are managed
- Studying how various ISKCON projects perform both qualitatively and quantitatively – how many books are being distributed? How effective is the preaching? Are the devotees being cared for? Are the spiritual standards Srila Prabhupada gave us being followed?
- Examining the work of ISKCON’s leaders, from local authorities to GBC representatives, and assessing their performance

Obviously, it is not possible for the GBC body to study the environment around each ISKCON project. Still, we can preach more effectively in a place when we come to understand the local material and spiritual

culture. The GBC will therefore develop methods local and regional leaders in all parts of the world can use to perform this scan.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

In recent years the GBC has begun to delegate elements of its authority to Regional Governing Bodies (RGBs) while ensuring that its ultimate authority to manage ISKCON remains intact. The GBC will review and analyze the RGBs' achievements and challenges in order to define and implement a system for regional or national management in all parts of the world.

EXPANDING OUTREACH

During Srila Prabhupada's time, he personally led us forward by his example and precept into the field of preaching. Preaching thus became one of two core elements that define ISKCON (the other is care for our members, discussed below). This is what ISKCON is all about: more devotees and happier devotees.

The GBC's strategic planning Outreach Committee is designed to ensure that the service of sharing Krishna consciousness remains at the heart of what it means to belong to ISKCON. The GBC is meant to lead devotees into the preaching field on Srila Prabhupada's behalf and to inspire us to spread Krishna consciousness.

To do this they need to encourage the devotees under their care to understand the needs and attitudes of their local cultures, to make sure the preaching is relevant to and appropriate for the local society, and to help the devotees measure their preaching success by such things as an increase in people joining the movement.

Srila Prabhupada gave us particular preaching strategies – book distribution, harinam-sankirtan, life membership, and farm projects, to name a few. Yet Srila Prabhupada was ever willing to adjust his methods if they did not yield the best results. Do our traditional preaching strategies require any adjustment according to time, place, and circumstance? Asking these questions and brainstorming outreach options will allow the GBC to encourage the most effective styles of preaching in each area.

DEVOTEE CARE

Equally if not more important than ISKCON's outreach efforts is the spiritual care and development of our current members. We want more devotees and happier devotees.

Of the seven purposes Srila Prabhupada established for ISKCON, at least two directly refer to services for the members of the Society:

To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Krishna, the prime entity, and thus to develop the idea, within the members, and humanity, at large, that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead (Krishna);

To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler and more natural way of life.

It is vital, therefore, that the GBC lead the Society in developing and maintaining dynamic programs for the care of its members.

SPECIAL INITIATIVES

TEMPLE DEVELOPMENT

Srila Prabhupada wanted ISKCON's temples to be centers of intensive devotional service, especially in the form of the five main practices essential to *bhakti-yoga*: chanting the holy name, hearing *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, worshiping the Deity, serving Vaishnavas, and living in a holy place. He also wanted the temples to serve as hubs for outreach, where the spiritual lives of our guests could blossom. While some of our temples are meeting these objectives, many are struggling. This initiative examines Srila Prabhupada's instructions about temples and applies a "best practices" and mentorship approach to helping all ISKCON's temples better fulfill their purpose.

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AND AFFILIATES

When Srila Prabhupada was physically present, ISKCON seemed simpler – everything functioned around the temples, which remained under the greater umbrella of ISKCON. But as ISKCON has expanded and become more congregationally-based, devotees are expressing their service desires in a number of ways not easily accommodated or facilitated by the temples themselves. As a result, we have seen a proliferation of ISKCON-affiliated service organizations and projects. The purpose of this initiative is to understand and manage the relationship these organizations have with ISKCON in a way that serves Srila Prabhupada's core mission of spreading Krishna Consciousness as widely as possible.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

With ISKCON's expansion has come the need to address possible conflicts of interest in the Society's management. This initiative is working toward a way to address and manage conflicts of interest by delineating unacceptable or untenable conflicts and recommending a reporting procedure for those conflicts of interest that can be permitted.

BRINGING THE PLAN INTO THE WORLD OF ACTION

Strategic planning is worth only the paper it's printed on if the plans are not executed. Therefore the GBC is in the process of establishing systems by which ISKCON's current structures can be used to better effect, goals can be set and realized, and devotees can feel encouraged to come forward to help.

MINISTRIES AND OFFICES

Currently, the GBC has the following ministries and offices:

- a. Ministry of Book Distribution
- b. Ministry of Communications

- c. Ministry of Padayatra
- d. Ministry of Deity Worship
- e. Ministry of Cow Protection and Agriculture
- f. Ministry of Fund Development
- g. Ministry of Educational Development
- h. Central Office of Child Protection
- i. Congregational Development Ministry
- j. Guru Services Committee
- k. Youth Ministry
- l. Ministry of Health and Welfare
- m. Vaisnavi Ministry
- n. Ministry of Sannyasa Services
- o. Ministry of Justice
- p. ISKCON Resolve
- q. BBT Construction Grant Allocation Committee
- r. Sastric Advisory Council
- s. ISKCON Property Office
- t. GBC Vaisnava Calendar Committee
- u. GBC Appointment Committee
- v. International Steering Committee

Key to implementing any of these initiatives is to strengthen and expand the existing ISKCON ministries and other global offices so they can better serve the Society. Initially set up by Srila Prabhupada, the ministries and offices have managed to provide services in a number of areas (see sidebar) despite severe underfunding. This initiative is meant to help support the ministries by helping them reach the devotees they are meant to serve and providing earmarked funds for specific projects and programs.

DEVELOPING AN EXECUTIVE STRATEGY FOR THE GBC

Accountability is essential to any strategic planning effort. The members of the GBC have decided they can best be helped to remain accountable by appointing one of their own members to assess their performance. The current system, where individual GBC members answer to the whole GBC body, does not seem a practical way to encourage accountability and ensure that the GBC's directives and goals are accomplished. The executive strategies are designed to hold members responsible for their services and increase their effectiveness within the Society.

The GBC body has decided to appoint an Executive Director to whom individual GBC members will report as they fulfill the fundamental assignments Srila Prabhupada gave them, implement the GBC's resolutions, and make progress in activities related to strategic planning. Because a tremendous amount of work needs to be done, the Executive Director will be assisted by Divisional Directors, each assigned to a specific area where more help is required.

Neither the Executive Director nor the Divisional Directors will interface regularly with temple presidents, projects leaders, or regional governing bodies. Dealing with these entities will remain the responsibility of GBC members. The Executive Director and the Divisional Directors are designed to work primarily with individual GBC members and to assist them in accomplishing the goals they have set.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director will serve the GBC by ensuring the execution of the GBC's three primary directives. Specific responsibilities include:

- Establishing priorities, objectives, and goals
- Establishing systems designed to get more done
- Management of their staff and resources
- Supervising GBC zonal representatives on behalf of the GBC body

DIVISIONAL DIRECTORS

The Executive Director will work through Divisional Directors. Generally, a Divisional Director will be appointed for every major area of effort (listed below). The Executive Director will establish overall objectives within each area consistent with the GBC's three primary directives. Each Divisional Director will then create, under the Executive Director's guidance, goals designed to bring these objectives about.

The following Divisional Directors will be established:

- Director of Devotee Care
 - To promote the well-being of ISKCON devotees in all areas of their lives – physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual
 - As part of that promotion, to offer education through courses, seminars, media, and other means to address the holistic needs and growth of the devotees; these programs are meant to stimulate the mood of all-round service to Vaisnavas and to support individuals in their attempt to attain pure Krishna consciousness
 - To establish a “best practices” methodology on key devotional care developments and practices within the Society
 - To interface with the Devotee Care Committee
- Director of Outreach Initiatives
 - To organize and supervise projects and campaigns aimed at improving the quality and quantity of how Krishna consciousness is propagated around the world
 - To monitor yatras in the third world and in areas where ISKCON is still developing, and to help those yatras grow
 - To establish a “best practices” methodology on outreach methods used by ISKCON and to make sure they are the most effective they can be
 - To interface with the Outreach Committee
- Director of Administration and Systems Development
 - To provide all areas of the Executive Strategies with a “systems thinking” approach – an awareness that everything in ISKCON is interdependent and must be examined as a whole rather than only looking at parts
 - To create and maintain appropriate systems, and to clarify functions, capabilities, roles, and structures for the smooth and productive operation of ISKCON
 - To ensure that these systems are implemented and monitored so they serve their intended purposes and do not create unintended consequences
 - To provide an ongoing analysis of these systems and procedures and to update or modify them when necessary
 - To supervise the work of the GBC Secretariat's and Executive Director's staff
 - To interface with the Organizational Development Committee
- Director of Succession
 - To ensure the smooth and proper succession of ISKCON leadership by identifying potential leaders, training them, helping them to accept the full implications of servant-

- leadership, supervising their development, and facilitating their being sent out into the field
 - To interface with the Succession Committee
- Director of Strategic Planning
 - To oversee the design and implementation of realistic plans for how to achieve the GBC's three primary directives
 - To ensure that the GBC's work focuses on long-term achievements (what could the GBC be doing that would leave Vaisnavas two hundred years from now feeling grateful?)
 - To interface with the Strategic Planning Team
- Director of Legal, Accounting, and Regulatory Compliance
 - To ensure the Society's compliance with internal and external legal, accounting, and regulatory requirements
 - To protect ISKCON's properties and assets, both hard and soft
 - To oversee the national and local incorporation of ISKCON's affiliates
- Director of Community Relations
 - To liaise between the GBC and the ISKCON community
 - To identify the needs of ISKCON members that are unique to where they are serving and to bring those needs to the GBC's attention
 - To assure that the GBC and its policies are presented in a consistent and appropriate way to the members of ISKCON
- Director of Ministry Supervision
 - To supervise and support the GBC Ministries by making sure devotees worldwide and in any language are aware of the resources available to them
 - To assist with travel coordination
 - To examine how the ministries use their grants
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- Director of Education
 - To promote the educational initiatives established by the Education Committee
 - To help establish a "best practices" methodology on key Education developments and practices within the Society
 - To promote a new educational ethos throughout ISKCON
 - To interface with the Education Committee
- Director of Organizational Development
 - Work to ensure that the different parts of the organization and its functioning, and interaction between the parts reaches higher levels of productivity and effectiveness.
 - Interact with all concerned parties toward facilitating the creation of a favorable culture for the development of the individuals involved and the functioning of the Society.
 - To interface with the Organizational Development Committee

GBC COMMITTEES

The Executive Director receives essential authority and direction from the GBC, but he must also be given the facility to present his vision for his service to the GBC. An ongoing and respectful exchange between the GBC and the Executive Director is crucial for ensuring that the strategic plan is prioritized and carried out even as the Executive Director remains a servant to the will of the GBC body.

Still, taking direction from – by present standards – a group of approximately thirty-five people meeting officially only once or twice a year renders the executive process cumbersome, impractical, and hardly productive.

To address this problem, some GBC committees have been delegated executive power on behalf of the body as GBC Executive Committees to interact with and provide guidance to the Executive Director. These Executive Committees will be standing committees.

These committees are:

- Devotee Care
- Outreach
- Organizational Development
- Succession
- Strategic Planning
- Educational Development
- Global Development (Fund Development)

CONCLUSION

During the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the GBC in Mayapur in 1975, Srila Prabhupada approved their first resolution:

The GBC (Governing Body Commission) has been established by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada to represent him in carrying out the responsibility of managing the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, of which he is the Founder-Acarya and supreme authority.

The GBC accepts as its life and soul his divine instructions, and recognizes that it is completely dependent on his mercy in all respects.

We aspire to better serve the will of Srila Prabhupada and to share in his extraordinary mercy, which will empower us to serve their Lordships Sri Sri Radha and Krishna.