

Mission, Vision & Values

1. Mission Statement

Why We Exist

A mission statement serves as the compass in the storm of organizational life. It is a statement of purpose of an organization. It may be a short sentence, but it should spell out your organization's overall goal and have the potential to guide your decisions and actions. It provides the framework within which you can develop strategies and plans.

The mission statement gives an answer to the following essential questions:

Why do we exist as an organization?

and

What do we do for whom?

Other ways to get to the bottom of this are to ask:

What is our cause – the purpose for our existence?

What gap do we fill? How do we make difference?

Why should people care about what we do?

The “*Why*” should be the first question, but it is tightly linked to the question of “*What do we do for whom?*”

In as few words as possible, the mission statement should describe the core outcome, such as a service or product, and the people for whom it will make a difference. If you are truly filling a gap, this is your *unique value contribution*.

Note that in some cases, for example for non-profit organizations, the people receiving the services or products may not be the same people as those who are paying for the services or products. It is crucial to think about the needs of both those groups and how the organization contributes value to both of them.

The mission statement should be written as succinctly as possible. It should not include any specifics about methods or technology, unless those are essential in filling a gap.

It is important to keep the statement in simple terms, so it can easily be understood and talked about in an informal conversation.

2. Vision Statement

Where We Are Headed

The vision statement is directed to the future. It describes a *desired end state* – an inspirational long-term change that you want to result from your work.

The vision statement gives an answer to the question:

What will be different if we are successful?

When developing a vision statement, imagine a dream end state in the longer-term future.

An effective vision statement creates a mental image of a future state that the organization wants to achieve. It is aspirational and inspirational – it should challenge and motivate your members.

The vision can be utopian, describing a world in which all your goals were achieved. However, while your vision may describe an unlikely ideal, it should follow logically from your mission statement – it is the state that would result if your mission were accomplished to perfection.

On the next page are some examples of famous mission and vision statements. Note in those examples how the vision – even though it describes a utopian, rather than realistic state, follows directly from the mission.

As you craft your mission statement, you may also consider starting out with your vision statement to lead into your mission statement, along these lines:

“Our vision is a community where _____.

To bring that into reality, we do _____.”

Examples of Mission and Vision Statements

Feeding America

Mission:

Our mission is to feed America's hungry through a nationwide network of member food banks and engage our country in the fight to end hunger.

Vision:

Creating a hunger-free America.

Kiva

Mission:

We are a non-profit organization with a mission to connect people through lending to alleviate poverty.

Vision:

We envision a world where all people – even in the most remote areas of the globe – hold the power to create opportunity for themselves and others.

Habitat for Humanity International

Mission:

Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities and hope.

Vision:

A world where everyone has a decent place to live.

3. Values Statement

What We Stand For

Values are the principles that guide your organization's day-to-day decisions. An effective value statement therefore has very practical applications. It specifies the core priorities of the organizational culture, in line with the ideals defined in your mission and vision.

The values statement gives an answer to the question:

What principles guide the way we work and make decisions?

Within the trio of mission, vision and values, the values statement is perhaps the most under-rated. A well-written values statement is a very practical tool. It can guide the decisions of the organization as a whole, as well as those of its members. It tells the world outside and inside the organization what you are committing to. By defining your priorities, the values statement helps you make tough decisions as they come along. It is a tool by which you can measure whether or not you are indeed walking the talk.

To define your values, it is a good idea to first look outside the organization, to the visionary outcomes you want to create in your community.

What values would have to be the norm in your community so that your vision could become a reality?

From there, you can look inside and define how your own work will model those values.

How do you ensure you are teaching those values by example?

Whenever you face tough decisions, how will you choose the courses of actions that are most aligned with those values?

Without a values-based context for decision-making, groups are more likely to default to fear-based or other impulsive decisions when things get tough. To have discussed core values ahead of time is a great defense against those, and empowers a group to keep making the right decisions in the face of difficulties.

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