

Mission, Vision, Values, and Purpose

Mission, vision, and values statements are vital for nonprofit organizations. The statements should be distinct yet connected – the mission guides the organization daily, while the vision highlights the organization’s long-term intended path. The values are the principles and beliefs that guide the actions of board members, staff, and volunteers.

How does an organization’s purpose integrate with mission, vision, and values?

Purpose is the collective goal of the ecosystem you work in and is advanced in partnership with other community organizations working toward similar goals. Collective purpose is considered during the strategic planning session, but as the purpose is collective, it is not usually determined by one organization but by the ecosystem. In the best-case scenario, collective purpose is formally decided during a community strategy or collective impact process. In the absence of either process, it is more likely that everyone in the ecosystem will have a slightly different yet aligned definition.

What is a Mission Statement?

The mission is why your organization exists, who you serve, and what you aspire to accomplish; it frames your part of the work in service to the collective vision of the ecosystem and its purpose.

What makes a good Mission Statement?

An effective mission statement is concise, realistic, inspirational, motivational, informative, and even emotional. It is not too abstract. The mission reflects the values and clearly states the purpose of the organization.

What is a Vision Statement?

A vision is the three-year big-picture goal to which your organization aspires. It is the future state your organization seeks to create for the community you serve. The vision is usually set during a strategic planning process.

What makes a good Vision Statement?

The vision inspires action: planning, fundraising, marketing, good governance, and sound management. It stimulates operational goals and aligns the work in service of those goals.

What are your values?

Values guide the work and individual behaviors and are closely held. They are the ethical guidelines and standards that direct all action. Values are often set during strategic planning.

Why should your organization have a Mission Statement, Vision Statement, and Values?

Mission statements provide the basis for judging the success of an organization and its programs. They help verify that the organization is on the right track and provide direction when the organization needs to adapt to new demands.

Vision statements guide the overall long-term thinking. The organizational vision keeps the mission on the right track. It reminds the staff and the board that their work will have a long-term impact even after they are gone.

Value statements remind everyone of the behavioral expectations, offer a standard for care, and demonstrate a commitment to your constituents and your community.

Who should be involved in coming up with Mission, Vision, and Values?

Board members represent the community and, therefore, bring vital perspectives that help determine the needs to be met by the organization. Staff members and volunteers bring a valuable internal perspective to the process of creating, revising, or reviewing the mission statement. Additionally, they implement the mission, make daily decisions about programs and services that reflect the mission, and play a pivotal part in developing the ideas and statements that will guide their work.

Creating your Mission Statement:

Creating a mission statement is a group effort. Board members, staff, members, donors, and other constituents can provide valuable input during the creative process. The entire board should approve the final wording.

Creating your Vision Statement

The board is ultimately responsible for setting the organization's future path. Getting feedback from staff, constituents, or other stakeholders is also beneficial. The mere process of creating a statement helps to focus the participants. A vision statement has a team-building effect: It is created through a group process, and every board member must share the ideals and values of what lies ahead for their work.

How are Mission and Vision statements used to set strategy?

How your Mission Statement is used strategically:

The mission statement should be continuously referenced and reassessed on a regular basis, usually during the strategic planning process. The board may also consider whether internal or external changes necessitate a revision.

How your Vision Statement is used strategically:

If an organization does not already have one, it will be drafted during strategic planning, during which the board and senior staff can brainstorm, dream, and share their aspirations. All goals and work plans are aligned to advance the organization's vision.

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