

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FACTSHEET

The Importance of Organizational Mission and Vision

Organizations that do not take the time to develop missions are often **ineffective**. More importantly, an African community organization's mission statement demonstrates the number of invaluable ties the organization has to its community.

Without our communities, our organizations lack our most basic reason for being.



What are organization mission and vision statements?

A **mission statement** explains why the organization exists – its overall purpose. The mission statement also states what the organization does right now, in the most general sense. In this way, the mission also sets parameters for what the organization, through omission, does not do.

Example of a mission statement: “The African Association of Biltmore builds healthy African immigrant communities through community outreach, public education, and direct assistance services.”

By comparison, the **vision statement** articulates the future of the organization and the community that it serves. The vision statement, when compared with the current reality of the organization or the community, implies the work still needs to be accomplished. In this way, it lends credibility and motivation to the mission statement.

Example of a vision statement: “The African Association of Biltmore envisions healthy African immigrant communities that are both self-sufficient and fully integrated within American society.”

Considerations when writing a mission statement

- Mission statements should be developed with awareness of: the served community; the broader society; the primary activities of programs, staff, and volunteers; the history of the issue(s) that you are addressing in your community; the values held by your staff and volunteers.
- Avoid long statements. Mission statements should not be highly specific, and clarity is not necessarily improved with length. Make sure your mission statement is no more than one or two sentences.
- Use active verbs that distinguish your organization but do not limit the scope of your programs and services. For example: “enable,” “build,” “dedicate,” “grow,” “serve,” or “engage.”
- Re-examine the mission every five years to maintain relevance to the served community and its needs.

You can only jump over a ditch if you have seen it from afar.

– African proverb

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Considerations when writing a vision statement

- Visions incorporate goals for the future: but whose goals? Make sure the goals set out by your organization are shared by the community you serve.
- Visions are often value-laden statements. Values should be broad and inclusive to incorporate as many people and perspectives as possible.
- Visions should be optimistic and inspiring: to you, organization staff, and the community you serve. "We believe in the equality of all people, regardless of race, class, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation."

Dissecting an example of mission and vision statements

The following mission and vision statements come from Refugee Action in the United Kingdom:

Mission: *Refugee Action exists to enable refugees to build new lives, through advice and information, community development, enhancing opportunity, and campaigning for refugee rights.*

Vision: *We want a society in which refugees are welcome, respected and safe, and in which they can achieve their potential.*

- ⇒ The mission statement clearly states why Refugee Action exists and whom the organization exists for – refugees. The statement contains a key action verb - enable- which explains the relationship the organization has with its served community. The mission also lists its primary program areas; this helps to clarify what "enable" invoices, and, by omission, what it does not.
- ⇒ The vision statement is appropriately future oriented: "We want...", Again, the community you serve is at the center of the statement. The vision statement is clearly a goal upon which the mission is centered, and it concisely implies the work to be accomplished.

In short, the mission guides Refugee Action in its daily work, and the vision inspires the organization and the community to never give up on its future goals.

Does your organization have an effective mission and vision statement?

Sources

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