



THE MISSION STATEMENT

What is a mission statement?

Every organization needs to define its fundamental purpose, philosophy, and values. The mission statement clarifies the essence of organizational existence. It describes the needs the organization was created to fill and answers the basic question of why the organization exists.

Why have one?

Without guidance, it is difficult to establish boundaries for appropriate course of action. The mission statement provides the basis for judging the success of the organization and its programs. It helps to verify if the organization is on the right track and making the right decisions. It provides direction when the organization needs to adapt to new demands. Attention to mission helps the board adhere to its primary purpose and helps during conflicts by serving as a touchstone for every decision. The mission statement can be used as a tool for resource allocation. A powerful mission statement attracts donors, volunteers, and community involvement.

How to develop a mission statement

An effective mission statement is concise, to the point, realistic, operational, inspirational, motivational, informative, and even emotional. It is not too abstract or even too intellectual. The mission clearly states the purpose of the organization. It is forward-thinking, positive, and describes success. It is well-defined and focused so that the reader can identify with the statement. It reflects the values and clearly enumerates the reasons why the organization exists.

Who should create or revise it?

Creating a mission statement is a group effort. Board members, present and past officers, staff, members, donors, and constituents can provide valuable input during the creative process. The final wording should be approved by the entire board.

The mission statement should be referred to continuously. It should be reassessed on a regular basis and not forgotten in a binder with other board documents. It should be present everywhere: on the letterhead, brochures, and official documents. It should be mentioned in the articles of incorporation and the bylaws. Before joining a board, all potential board members should review the mission statement to verify whether their understanding of

the purpose of the organization is compatible with their own beliefs.

Samples

Think of what you are trying to accomplish rather than how you will do it.

NO: "Our mission is to provide free books to local schools."

YES: "We want to stimulate love of learning and reading in young people."

NO: "Our mission is to assist people in searching for their roots and draw their genealogy chart."

YES: "We hope to enrich people's lives by helping to enhance their link to their past."

NO: "Our theater is the venue for the most contemporary and avant garde ballet creations."

YES: "We want is to enlighten, excite, and educate the audience through dance."

References

The Nonprofit Board's Role in Mission, Planning, and Evaluation.
Available at www.boardsource.org or by calling 202-349-2500.

BoardSource © 2013. Text may not be reproduced without written permission from BoardSource. For more information, call 1-877-892-6273 or e-mail learningcenter@boardsource.org.