

### Mission and Vision Statements

Mission statements seemed to be the “in” things in the 90's. Organizations ranging from major corporations to family farms to various nonprofit organizations wrote mission statements and/ or developed organizational vision statements. Is this a fad that will soon fade or do these statements offer something that will help your organization improve its effectiveness?

A **mission statement** describes in a few words why an organization exists, stating what the organization does, for whose benefit, and to what end. In contrast, a **vision statement** describes what members want their organization to be in the future. It presents a long-range desired picture of the organization that members will strive toward achieving. Key elements of a vision statement are: the values members want to guide the organization, the impacts they want to achieve, and the image the organization wants to project. Sometimes that vision is imagined and stated as though it already exists.

#### Sample Statements

Here is the mission statement of a hypothetical Chamber of Commerce and the vision statement of Cooperative Extension, University of Wisconsin-Extension.

*The (your city) Chamber of Commerce provides economic development planning, community development, convention and insurance services for community visitors, large and small businesses, and non-profit organizations to enhance the business climate of the community.*

*We (UW Extension) are a world class organization of inspired university educators committed to helping people use knowledge to improve their lives.*

#### Why Have Mission and Vision Statements?

Each statement serves a different, but complementary purpose. The mission statement sets boundaries within which the organization operates in the present. It helps keep members focused on the most important and essential activities. A vision statement, on the other hand taps deeper values and aspirations. It serves as a motivational tool to inspire and sustain member commitment. It also fosters forward thinking, action, and exploration of unrealized possibilities.

Taken together, the two statements are tools which provide a healthy crosscheck-the mission statement setting limits and priorities and the vision statement inspiring longer term expansive thinking. These tools are helpful in these specific ways.

#### Communications

Each statement facilitates communication inside and outside the organization. The mission statement alerts non-members and potential members of the kinds of programs and activities that they can expect from the organization. The vision statement communicates the character, the desire for improvement, and quality that sustains the organization and inspires support for its work.

#### Planning

The mission statement provides a framework for planning, helps in setting priorities, and helps to recognize activities that should NOT be carried out. The vision statement stimulates creative thought and action to foster change and growth.

## Evaluation Tool

All decisions and actions of the organization should be evaluated by how they contribute to achieving the current mission and how they support the movement toward the organization's vision.

## Developing Mission and Vision Statements

The mission statement probably already exists in articles of incorporation or other founding documents of most organizations. However, it is a good idea to periodically review the mission and, as needed revise it. The responsibility for writing or revising a mission statement usually rests with the leadership, e.g. the executive committee and board of directors. Leaders can develop or revise the mission by thoughtful reflection on three questions:

- 1) What ends does our organization exist to serve?
- 2) Who do we serve?
- 3) What do we do to serve our beneficiaries and achieve our desired ends?

To be effective as a guide for group decisions and actions, the process must allow ample time for review, discussion, and input from the membership in developing and finalizing the statement.

Many groups do not have a vision statement. Often times the aspirations of members are only loosely known and vaguely expressed at all.

An effective way to develop a vision statement is to involve members in discussing and recording answers to three questions:

- 1) What values and principals do we hold and aspire to for our internal organizational culture and as an expression to the larger community?
- 2) What impact do we want our organization to have on people we serve and the larger community?
- 3) How do we want people outside the organization to see us?

Then by clustering peoples' ideas you can distill a statement that captures collective aspirations.

Boil the various thoughts down to a few essential ideas that can be expressed in a brief statement for both mission and vision statements. That way they will be remembered and applied on a day-to-day basis. A more detailed set of ideas can be included in a longer version of the statement if there is a use for it. The first priority however should be developing the short concise statements that can be readily remembered and applied.

## Not a Fad, a Real Help

A group without a clear sense of its mission and vision is like a ship without a rudder, It will be helplessly pushed and pulled by outside forces—unable to sets its own course. Its energy is spent reacting to the current problem facing it. Mission and vision statements provide the rudder with which leaders and members can cut through the distractions thrown in their way and keep their efforts focused.

Are mission and vision statements a fad? Effective organizations have used mission and vision statements long before they came into fashion. With the knowledge to develop effective mission and vision statements and the commitment to use them, the effectiveness of your organization can be greatly increased.

### Less Time, More Impact

*An Oconto County University  
Extension Leadership  
Development Fact Sheet*

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