

What Is a Vision Statement?



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Writing a vision statement can be a daunting task even for the most articulate entrepreneurs. These tips, steps and examples will help you construct a meaningful vision statement.

Writing a vision statement for your business is a daunting task. For one thing, it must define your company and, more importantly, its future. For another, you don't want it to be relegated to a forgotten poster hanging in the office lobby.

A powerful vision statement stays with you, such as Disney's "to make people happy" or Instagram's "capture and share the world's moments." If you are intentional in your efforts and committed to doing the hard work, you can create a vision statement that encapsulates your organization's core ideals and provides a roadmap to where it wants to go.

What is a vision statement?

Similar to a mission statement, a vision statement provides a concrete way for stakeholders, especially employees, to understand the meaning and purpose of your business. However, unlike a mission statement – which describes the who, what and why of your business – a vision statement describes the desired long-term results of your company's efforts. For example, an early Microsoft vision statement was "a computer on every desk and in every home."

"A company vision statement reveals, at the highest levels, what an organization most hopes to be and achieve in the long term," said Katie Trauth Taylor, CEO of writing consultancy Untold Content. "It serves a somewhat lofty purpose – to harness all the company's foresight into one impactful statement."

Why does this matter? [Research shows](#) that employees who find their company's vision meaningful have engagement levels of 68%, which is 18 points above average. More

engaged employees are often more productive, and they are more effective corporate ambassadors in the larger community.

Given the impact that a vision statement can have on a company's long-term success and even its bottom line, it is worth taking the time to craft a statement that synthesizes your ambition and mobilizes your staff.

What is the difference between a vision statement and a mission statement?

Before determining your vision statement, you need to understand what it is not. It should not be confused with a [mission statement](#). Those statements are based in the present and designed to convey why the business exists to both members of the company and the external community.

Vision statements, on the other hand, are future-based and meant to inspire and give direction to employees of the company rather than customers.

"The vision is about your goals for the future and how you will get there, whereas the mission is about where you are now and why you exist," said Paige Arnof-Fenn, founder and CEO of Mavens & Moguls, a global strategic marketing consulting firm. "The vision should motivate the team to make a difference and be part of something bigger than themselves."

"While a mission statement focuses on the purpose of the brand, the vision statement looks to the fulfillment of that purpose," added Jessica Honard, co-owner of North Star Messaging + Strategy, a copywriting and messaging firm that serves entrepreneurs.

Although both mission and vision statements should be core elements of your organization, a vision statement should serve as your company's guiding light.

"A vision is aspiration. A mission is actionable," said Jamie Falkowski, managing director at marketing and communications company Day One Agency.

Who shapes your vision?

The first step in writing a vision statement is determining who will play a role in crafting it. In a small business, it is simple enough to gather the insight of every member of the organization. In a larger operation, you may need to be more selective while still ensuring that you capture a range of employee voices.

To accomplish this, Brandon Shockley, director of research at branding and marketing firm 160over90, recommends hosting a series of workshops with key stakeholders who

represent a cross-section of your organization. You can assemble teams to create alternate versions of the statement and receive feedback from the rest of the company.

Falkowski also suggests individual stakeholder interviews as an effective way to encourage candor among all invested parties and to gather real and honest feedback. Employees can identify common themes and describe the organization's future in words or pictures as a basis for a vision statement.



Key Takeaway: The first step in writing a vision statement is determining who will play a role in crafting it.

How to use your vision statement

You should determine early on where your vision statement will appear and what role it will serve in your organization. This will make the process more than a mere intellectual exercise, said Shockley. It is pointless to hang a vision statement in the lobby or [promote it on social media](#) if it is never truly integrated into [company culture](#).

"The vision business statement should be thought of as part of your strategic plan," said Shockley. "It is an internal communications tool that helps align and inspire your team to reach the company's goals."

As such, a vision statement should be viewed as a living document that will be revisited and revised. Most importantly, it must speak directly to your employees.

"If your employees don't buy into the vision, you'll never be able to carry it out," said Keri Lindenmuth, marketing manager with the Kyle David Group, a web and tech solutions provider. "The vision statement should be something your employees believe in. Only then will they make decisions and take actions that reflect your business's vision."

One way to help employees take ownership of the vision is to hold company workshops and brainstorming sessions. In these meetings, encourage employees to identify ways they can incorporate the values of the vision statement into their day-to-day jobs. You can then acknowledge and [reward employees](#) when they are caught living the vision.

How to write a vision statement

Creating the perfect vision statement may seem like an overwhelming task, but it does not have to be. You don't have to reinvent the wheel to develop a powerful vision statement. Instead, use the information you already have to guide your work, suggests Alison Brehme, founder of Virtual Corporate Wellness, a provider of employee health and wellness programs.

"A company's mission, purpose, goals and values are all involved in the creation of a company vision," Brehme said. "Weave these concepts and beliefs into your vision statement."

Lindenmuth advises also looking at the vision statements of your competitors to determine how you can differentiate your business from theirs.

A vision statement should be concise, no longer than a sentence or two. As Falkowski says, you want your entire organization to be able to quickly repeat it and, more importantly, understand it. However, a vision statement needs to be more than a catchy tagline. "[It] can be smart and memorable, but this is for your team and culture, not for selling a specific product," Falkowski said.



Tip: A vision statement should be concise, no longer than a sentence or two.

Don't fret if you feel that a short vision statement doesn't fully express the intricacies of your vision. You can create a longer version, but it should not be the one you broadcast to the world.

"Let's be honest – most business leaders, not to mention boards of directors, won't be able to sum up their vision in a pithy sentence or two. That's OK," said Shannon DeJong, owner of brand agency House of Who. "Have a full-length version of your vision for the leadership's eyes only. Think of the long version as your reference guide to why you're in business in the first place."

You can start by mapping out your business's most audacious goals, Taylor suggested. "Reviewing your long-term goals in a collaborative setting will help you then zoom out on what your organization and the world will look like if you achieve them. That zoomed-out view of your success is really the heart of your vision statement."

Taylor said her team established a foundational understanding of their company vision by asking probing questions about the core of the business, such as what deliverables they most enjoyed working on, the partners they loved working with and the atmosphere they hoped to create when collaborating.

"It's important to start with the big questions – after all, this type of statement establishes your organization's vision for what impact your business makes on the world," said Taylor.

Honard advises asking questions that reflect the eventual scale and impact your business will have when constructing a vision statement. These are a few of the questions she uses in guiding clients to identify their vision statement:

- What ultimate impact do I want my brand to have on my community, my industry or the world?
- In what way will my brand ultimately interact with customers and clients?

- What will the culture of my business look like, and how will that play out in employees' lives?

"Once you've answered these questions, you've created a roadmap between your present and your future," said Honard.

Don't be afraid to dream big once you gather all the information and get down to writing. Don't worry about practicality for now – what initially looks impossible could be achieved down the road with the right team and technologies. Work on shaping a vision statement that reflects the specific nature of your business and its aspirations.

Shockley said there is nothing wrong with a vision statement that is daring, distinct or even disagreeable. "If a vision statement sets out a generic goal that anyone can agree with, it is likely to produce mediocre results. A goal like 'delivering an exceptional experience' applies equally to a hospital, bank or fitness club."

If you're interested in taking your vision one step further, Taylor suggests creating a brand vision board. A vision board includes your company's tagline, a "who we are" statement, a "what we do" section, a business vision statement, an overview of your ideal clients, client pain points, your content mission statement, advertising, products and SEO keywords.

"A vision board serves as a one-page business plan that anyone in a company can reference quickly to remember the key concepts that drive the work," said Taylor.

Vision statement templates and resources

If you are still stuck on how to create a vision statement and cannot afford to hire professional help, you can easily access a host of downloadable worksheets and templates that offer a framework for developing a vision statement. These five worksheets can help you refine your vision statement:

- Smartsheet: [Vision statement worksheet](#)
- Diggles Creative: [Brand vision worksheet](#)
- Whole Whale: [Nonprofit vision and mission statement worksheet](#)
- Lone Star College System: [Worksheets for developing mission and vision statements](#)
- Khorus: [Mission, vision and values worksheets](#)

These free resources offer step-by-step instructions to help you identify your company's key values, priorities and goals, bringing you closer to articulating your unique vision. You can use them yourself or collectively with your staff.

20 examples of inspiring vision statements

Checking out some memorable and distinct vision statements may be all the inspiration you need to write your own. Here are some of the best.

1. **Amazon:** "To be Earth's most customer-centric company where customers can find and discover anything they might want to buy online."
2. **Ben & Jerry's:** "Making the best ice cream in the nicest possible way."
3. **Caterpillar:** "Our vision is a world in which all people's basic needs – such as shelter, clean water, sanitation, food and reliable power – are fulfilled in an environmentally sustainable way, and a company that improves the quality of the environment and the communities where we live and work."
4. **Google:** "To provide access to the world's information in one click."
5. **Habitat for Humanity:** "A world where everyone has a decent place to live."
6. **Hilton Hotels & Resorts:** "To fill the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality."
7. **IKEA:** "To create a better everyday life for the many people."
8. **Intel:** "If it's smart and connected, it's best with Intel."
9. **LinkedIn:** "Create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce."
10. **Oxfam:** "A world without poverty."
11. **Patagonia:** "Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis."
12. **Prezi:** "To reinvent how people share knowledge, tell stories, and inspire their audiences to act."
13. **Samsung:** "Inspire the world, create the future."
14. **Smithsonian:** "By 2022, the Smithsonian will build on its unique strengths to engage and to inspire more people, where they are, with greater impact, while catalyzing critical conversation on issues affecting our nation and the world."
15. **Southwest Airlines:** "To become the world's most loved, most flown and most profitable airline."
16. **Sweetgreen:** "To inspire healthier communities by connecting people to real food."
17. **TED:** "Spread ideas."
18. **Walgreens:** "To be America's most loved pharmacy-led health, well-being and beauty company."
19. **Warby Parker:** "To offer designer eyewear at a revolutionary price, while leading the way for socially conscious businesses."
20. **Wyeth:** "To lead the way to a healthier world. By carrying out this vision at every level of our organization, we will be recognized by our employees, customers and shareholders as the best pharmaceutical company in the world, resulting in value for all."



Did You Know? Often, the hardest part of creating a vision statement is coming up with wording that truly defines your values and shines a light on your corporate identity without sounding too vague.

Tips for crafting your vision statement

A vision statement should stretch the imagination while providing guidance and clarity. It will inform your company's direction and set priorities while challenging your employees to grow. Above all, a vision statement must be compelling – not just to the high-level executives of your company, but to all employees.

Often, the hardest part of creating a vision statement is coming up with wording that truly defines your values and shines a light on your corporate identity without sounding too vague. A specific and unique vision statement is a good place to begin distinguishing your business from the rest of the industry.

"Vision statements should demonstrate how the world will be different now that your business is in it," said DeJong. She believes there needs to be legitimate passion behind a vision statement in order for it to be effective. "So many leaders play it too safe with their vision, and this is a big mistake when it comes to developing a brand people actually care about."

Based on our expert sources' advice, here's a quick recap of what to do when formalizing a vision statement that reflects the uniqueness of your organization:

- Project five to 10 years in the future.
- Dream big and focus on success.
- Use the present tense.
- Use clear, concise, jargon-free language.
- Infuse it with passion and make it inspiring.
- Align it with your business values and goals.
- Create a plan to communicate your vision statement to your employees.
- Prepare to commit time and resources to the vision you establish.

Your completed vision statement should offer a clear idea of your company's path forward. Honard said that many of her clients have used their vision statements to direct their overall plans for the future. For example, they've adopted new marketing initiatives to move them closer to their vision, pivoted their focus to clearly reflect their desired outcome, or doubled down on one particular aspect of their brand that is working in service of their vision.

Visions don't need to be set in stone

Now that you know all the rules of creating a vision statement, there is only one lesson left to learn: Sometimes you need to break some of the rules in your company's journey to define its own vision.

Many companies benefit from having a vision statement right from their inception, but maybe that's not the case for yours. If you have a very young company, it is perfectly acceptable not to commit to one specific vision from day one.

"Getting too tied into one master statement can really mess with the learning and creation process in the early stages," said Sonia Langlotz, CEO and founder of marketing and communications collective Round Twelve. She encourages her clients to write a vision statement every month, save the previous drafts, and see what sticks and what doesn't over time.

"After the first year, you can look back and see how much you have evolved," Langlotz said. "What parts or words within the statement stuck around and what was dropped? Those key words tend to end up being major brand pillars you can always come back to and eventually become part of the brand ethos."

Tying yourself down to a particular vision statement in the early days of your business may limit your opportunities for growth or blind you to the need for change.

"At the end of the day, trust your gut, test and check, look at the analytics, invest in the feedback your customer is giving you," Langlotz said. "If you aren't willing to step outside of your initial vision for your business, you might miss a huge opportunity!"

Regardless of how many years you have been in business or how long you have had your vision statement, you are not stuck with it. Don't be afraid to change it, even if you spent time and money developing it, if it stops feeling right.

DeJong recalls how her agency developed a new vision statement a few years ago that just didn't fit. "While the words sounded beautiful and it seemed accurate, our vision was simply too intangible to lend itself toward a mission that felt real." As a result, she reworked her vision to better align with her brand, and she couldn't be happier with it.

"Having a tack-sharp, specific vision has helped me and my entire team double down on our efforts, think more creatively, and feel more motivated every single day," she said.

Above all, your vision statement should be a constant reminder to you and your team that the end goal is bigger than the everyday. This message is an important one to hold on to, especially on the most difficult days.

Paula Fernandes contributed to the reporting and writing in this article. Some source interviews were conducted for a previous version of this article.

Image Credit: fizkes / Getty Images



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How To Write Effective Vision And Mission Statements

<https://peakon.com/us/blog/growth-development/how-to-write-effective-vision-and-mission-statements/>

If there's one thing that all the analysis of the Millennial generation agrees on, it's that working Millennials care about purpose over just their pay cheque. "Giving your young employees a purpose will enable them to envision a future with your company ... If an organisation is unable to map out a road plan, a purpose of employment, it will unfortunately notice a high 0-2 year turnover"

explains Prof. Karl Moore. We've found in our own research that you can notice people leaving up to 9 months beforehand and poor engagement is one of the direct causes for employees leaving their job. Considering Millennials will make up more than 75% of the global workforce in less than five years, effectively communicating your organisation's raison d'être is becoming more important every day. Well written vision and mission statements can be two of your most useful assets to do so. Along with defining purpose, these statements can also help align your organisation – speeding up decision making and lessening the chances of projects operating at odds with your company's real goals.

What is the difference between a vision and a mission statement?

First it's important to clear up any potential confusion about each statement – they are not (as some people suggest) interchangeable, they are written differently and serve different purposes. LinkedIn CEO, Jeff Weiner wrote the best descriptions of these statements that I've read. Here are his definitions, followed by LinkedIn's vision and mission: Vision – The dream; a team's true

north. Primary objective is to inspire and create a shared sense of purpose throughout the company.

Create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce. **Tweet**

Mission – Overarching objective of the organization; should be measurable, achievable, and ideally inspirational. Should not be used synonymously with a vision statement. A great mission statement is brief, easy to remember, minimizes the use of the word “and” (to prevent a laundry list), shouldn’t require follow-up clarifying questions when first presented, and ideally proves to be uniquely identifiable to the company, i.e. wouldn’t be confused for another company’s mission.

Connect the world’s professionals to make them more productive and successful. **Tweet**

The easiest way to differentiate the two statements is to see the vision as the ultimate (potentially even unreachable) goal of an organisation, followed by the mission that outlines what the company would have to do consistently and excellently to make this vision a reality.

Tips and examples for writing your vision and mission statements

Now we’ve looked at the different roles of these statements let’s move on to the process of formulating our own. In contrast to the LinkedIn examples, I’m going to write vision and mission statements for a local record store to demonstrate how this format suits businesses of any size.

Vision

It’s important to complete your vision statement first. Get started by writing down answers to the following questions (I’ve put my answers for the record store in italics). At this stage it’s a good time to involve a wider group in your company. You could ask all your co-founders, leadership team, or even every employee to answer these questions:

- What are the core values you believe employees should hold? It's always a good starting point to consider these values first. You can also think of these as the values you personally care so strongly for that you'd leave the company if they were not followed. *Honesty and humility in the way we operate our business and share our opinions. Friendliness in how we work with one another and welcome our customers. Enthusiasm for music and enabling others to discover new things.*
- Ideally what customers will you have in 15 years? From the record store example above you'd quickly need to consider if you want this to be a local store or whether your ambition is to start a chain or online retailer. *We will be one of the central institutions of our city's music scene. We will contribute greatly to the vibrancy of our local community and to welcome visitors from other places.*
- Ideally what problem would you be solving for these customers? Keep in mind the 15 years time frame from the previous question and imagine what sort of problems you want to be solving for these customers. Stick to problems over exact solutions as given the timeframe your solutions are likely to be outdated by then. *We will enable our customers to find the music they want on the format they want. We will help them discover new music and learn about music as an art form. We will be a platform for up-and-coming artists to perform and find their first audiences. We will give music lovers a place to meet and discuss their passion.*
- What is your business not? Your vision should be positive and not anti-something, but it can become clearer when you consider what you're in opposition to. *We are not just a shop, we do not compete on price or selection with the likes of Best Buy and Amazon. If we don't have something a customer wants we will help them find it elsewhere. We want to provide a real-world community experience based around music.*

Once you've got your answers you'll need to distill them into a single short paragraph. If you've collected answers from many people, try to group the answers into themes first. When writing your paragraph, keep in mind Jeff Weiner's point about not making a laundry list. Here's how my record store example looked at this stage:

We value friendship and honesty. We hope to become one of the musical centres for our city where you can browse and discover music, meet friends, or hear a performance from new artists. We see ourselves as more than a shop, we focus on creating an enjoyable, community experience. [Tweet](#)

All that's left is to turn your paragraph into a single sentence. However, unless you're a fantastic copywriter this is likely to be the trickiest task of all. Take your time and potentially you'll go through 20 draft sentences until you get something that reads well and really nails what you wanted to convey when answering the earlier questions. During this process refer to George Orwell's six elementary rules, they can be found on *The Economist's* [style guide page](#). (This will stop you writing any nonsense.) Here's the vision I eventually settled on for my record store:

Become one of our city's renowned cultural institutions. [Tweet](#)

Thinking back to the original goal of a vision statement, I would hope that if you got a job in this store you'd feel a greater sense of purpose than to simply ring up and bag records.

Mission

Unlike the vision which is future-based, your mission statement should be present-based – i.e. what would you need to do brilliantly now, and for the next 15 years, to achieve your vision? Look back at your answers to the earlier questions and pick out the most crucial elements based on how they relate to your vision. Now transform them into two or three key objectives that are measurable and ultimately achievable. Clear objectives will enable anyone reading your mission statement to instantly understand how it will shape your business strategy over the coming years. These were the objectives that I set, followed by how they could be measured:

- *Provide an eclectic selection of music our customers want* – this is reasonably simple, we'll find out if what we're selling is what our customers want by whether we're making money.

- *Introduce customers to new music through hand-picked recommendations and live performances* – we could judge this on whether staff are able to upsell or cross-sell when talking to customers, whether we can attract artists and audiences to the store, or perhaps if we can grow a large mailing list for a music recommendations newsletter.
- *Create a welcoming and friendly environment that becomes a hub for the local community* – this might be a little more subjective but you could still use Yelp or Google reviews as a guide. You could run initiatives to bring different sections of the community to meet in the store and judge the success based on the local press you receive.

Back to the tricky task of copywriting and getting this into one or two succinct sentences. Again, take your time and consider how this mission will be received by the rest of your company and what it would look like on your website's About page. Is it easily comprehensible, or have you gone off on a tangent using jargon? When I boiled down my objectives, here's the mission I was left with:

Feed the music lover's desire to cherish their favourite artists and discover new acts, with outstanding personal service and a friendly community setting. [Tweet](#)

To my earlier point about organisational alignment, your mission statement is not only the basis for your business strategy, it will put the reader in a state of mind that guides their day to day decision making. For the sake of the anecdote, working at this record store you probably wouldn't play a Spotify-algorithm-generated playlist over the stereo, nor would you shoo punters out the door for holding hour-long discussions about Radiohead's back catalogue once you've read this mission statement. In your business it might be the difference between someone wasting hundreds-of-thousands of dollars on a project and someone stopping them at the first ideation session by saying "how does this fit with our mission?". For the first few months of their existence I'd consider these statements to be part of a living document which you'll discuss with colleagues, friends and customers before they're set in stone. As with any feedback don't be happy with quiet or lukewarm responses, this is most likely people being too polite to tell you what they really think. Press them to find out what must be improved and make changes accordingly.

How you disseminate your finished work within your company and beyond is a topic in itself that we'll cover in a future post, but for now I hope I've given you a good guide to get started or review your existing statements. Now I feel like actually starting that record store!



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Chapter 8. Developing a Strategic Plan

Learn how to develop strategic and action plans.

- [Section 1. An Overview of Strategic Planning or "VMOSA" \(Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies, and Action Plans\)](#)
- [Section 2. Proclaiming Your Dream: Developing Vision and Mission Statements](#)
- [Section 3. Creating Objectives](#)
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Section 2. Proclaiming Your Dream: Developing Vision and Mission Statements



Creating your organization's vision and mission statements are the first two steps in the VMOSA action planning process. Developing a vision and mission statement is crucial to the success of community initiatives. These statements explain your group's aspirations in a concise manner, help your organization focus on what is really important, and provide a basis for developing other aspects of your strategic plan. This section provides a guide for developing and implementing your organization's vision and mission statements.

WHAT IS A VISION STATEMENT?

Your vision is your dream. It's what your organization believes are the ideal conditions for your community; that is, how things would look if the issue important to you were completely, perfectly addressed. It might be a world without war, or a community in which all people are treated as equals, regardless of gender or racial background.

Whatever your organization's dream is, it may be well articulated by one or more *vision statements*, which are short phrases or sentences that convey your community's hopes for the future. By developing a vision statement or statements, your organization clarifies the beliefs and governing principles of your organization, first for yourselves, and then for the greater community.

There are certain characteristics that most vision statements have in common. In general, vision statements should be:

- Understood and shared by members of the community
- Broad enough to include a diverse variety of local perspectives
- Inspiring and uplifting to everyone involved in your effort
- Easy to communicate - for example, they are generally short enough to fit on a T-shirt

Here are some examples of vision statements that meet the above criteria:

- A community where all individuals and families achieve their human potential.
- [CALCASA](#) envisions a world free from sexual violence.
- A future where tobacco is a thing of the past. ([Truth Initiative](#))
- A world without Alzheimer's Disease. ([Alzheimer's Association](#))
- The United States is a humane community in which all animals are treated with respect and kindness. ([ASPCA](#))
- A world where everyone has a decent place to live. ([Habitat for Humanity](#))

WHAT IS A MISSION STATEMENT?

The next step of the action planning process is to ground your vision in practical terms. This is where developing a *mission statement* comes in. An organization's mission statement describes *what* the group is going to do and *why* it's going to do that. An example is "Promoting care and caring at the end of life through coalitions and advocacy."

Mission statements are similar to vision statements, in that they, too, look at the big picture. However, they're more concrete, and they are definitely more "action-oriented" than vision statements. Your vision statement should inspire people to dream; your mission statement should inspire them to action.

The mission statement might refer to a problem, such as an inadequate housing, or a goal, such as providing universal access to health care. And, while they don't go into a lot of detail, they hint - very broadly - at how your organization might fix these problems or reach these goals. Some general guiding principles about mission statements are that they are:

- *Concise.* While not as short as vision statements, mission statements generally still get their point across in one sentence.
- *Outcome-oriented.* Mission statements explain the fundamental outcomes your organization is working to achieve.
- *Inclusive.* While mission statements do make statements about your group's key goals, it's very important that they do so very broadly. Good mission statements are not limiting in the strategies or sectors of the community that may become involved in the project.

The following examples should help you understand what we mean by effective mission statements.

- Promoting community health and development by connecting people, ideas and resources. (Community Tool Box)
- The California Coalition Against Sexual Assault ([CALCASA](#)) provides leadership, vision and resources to rape crisis centers, individuals and other entities committed to ending sexual violence.
- Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. ([Alzheimer's Association](#))
- The mission of the [ASPCA](#), as stated by Henry Bergh in 1866, is "to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States".
- Seeking to put God's love into action, [Habitat for Humanity](#) brings people together to build homes, communities and hope.

WHY SHOULD YOU CREATE VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS?

Why is it important that your organization develops vision and mission statements like those above? First of all, these statements can help your organization focus on what is really important. Although your organization knows what you are trying to do to improve your community, it's easy to lose sight of this when dealing with day-to-day organizational hassles. Your vision and mission statements remind members what is important.

Second, your vision and mission statements give other individuals and organizations a snapshot view of what your group is and what it wants to accomplish. When your vision and mission statements are easily visible (for example, if they are on the letterhead of your stationary), people learn about your organization without having to work hard for the information. Then, those with common interests can take the time necessary to learn more. This efficiency is very helpful when you are recruiting other people and organizations to join your effort.

Finally, vision and mission statements focus members on their common purpose. Not only do the statements themselves serve as a constant reminder of what is important to your organization, the process of developing them allows people to see the organization as "theirs". Creating these statements builds motivation as members will believe in something more completely if they had a hand in developing it.

Having a clear and compelling vision statement has other advantages, such as:

- Drawing people to common work
- Giving hope for a better future
- Inspiring community members to realize their dreams through positive, effective action
- Providing a basis for developing the other aspects of your action planning process: your mission, objectives, strategies, and action plans

Having a clear and compelling mission statement also has more advantages, such as:

- Converting the broad dreams of your vision into more specific, action-oriented terms
- Explaining your goals to interested parties in a clear and concise manner
- Enhancing your organization's image as being competent and professional, thus reassuring funding sources that their investment was (or would be!) a smart choice

HOW DO YOU CREATE VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS?

Now having a better understanding of vision and mission statements, your organization has the tools to develop your unique statements. If your group has already developed vision and mission statements, you might wish to look at them in light of the criteria we discussed above. If members of your organization feel your current statements could be improved, this process can be easily used to modify them. Let's begin.

LEARN WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

As developing your vision and mission statements is the first step in creating your action plan, it is especially important that these first steps are well grounded in community beliefs and values. Awareness of the important issues in your community is critical for the development of a strong, effective, and enduring action group.

Therefore, one of the first steps you should take when developing the vision and mission of your organization is to define the issue(s) that matter most to people in your community. How do you go about doing so?

There are many different ways you can gather this information, including:

Conducting "[public forums](#)" or "listening sessions" with members of the community to gather ideas, thoughts, and opinions about how they would like to see the community transformed.

In public forums or listening sessions, people gather from throughout the community to talk about what is important to them. These meetings are usually led by facilitators, who guide a discussion of what people perceive to be the community's strengths and problems, and what people wish the community was like. Someone typically records these meetings, and a transcript of what is said provides a basis for subsequent planning.

[Holding focus groups](#) with the people interested in addressing the issue(s), including community leaders, people most affected by the issues, businesses, church leaders, teachers, etc.

Focus groups are similar to public forums and listening sessions, but they are smaller and more intimate. Generally speaking, they are comprised of small groups of people with similar backgrounds, so they will feel comfortable talking openly about what concerns them. For example, the group members are generally about the same age, are of the same ethnic group, or have another common identity and/or experience. Focus groups function like public forums, and also use facilitators and recorders to focus and document discussion.

Your organization may hold focus groups with several different groups of people to get the most holistic view of the issue at hand. For example, if your organization is involved in child health, you might have one focus group with health care providers, another with parents or children, and still another with teachers. Once you have a rough mission statement, you might again hold a focus group for feedback.

Obtaining interviews with people in leadership and service positions, including such individuals as local politicians, school administrators, hospital and social service agency staff, about what problems or needs they believe exist in your community.

Often, these individuals will have both facts and experiences to back up their perspectives. If so, this data can be used later if and when you apply for funding, or when you request community support to address the issues. More information on this topic can be found in Chapter 3, Section 12: Conducting Interviews.

It's important to realize that these different ways of gathering information from your community are not mutually exclusive. In fact, if you have the resources, it is recommended to do all of the above: to have some time for the community at large to respond, then spend more time in focus groups with the people you believe might contribute greatly to (or be most affected by) some of the issues brought up in the public forum. And finally, some one-on-one time with community leaders can strengthen your knowledge and purpose; remember, there are community members who have been wrestling with the same issues you are now looking at for a long time. Take advantage of that experience so you don't waste time on something that's already been done.

DECIDE WHAT TO ASK

No matter if you are talking to one person or a crowd, your purpose is the same: to learn what matters in your community. Here's a list of questions you might use to focus your discussions with community members. These questions may be used for individual interviews, focus groups, public forums, or in [any other way you choose](#) to gather information.

- What is your dream/vision for our community?
- What would you like to see change?
- What kind of community (or program, policy, school, neighborhood, etc.) do we want to create?
- What do you see as the community's (or school's, neighborhood's, etc.) major issues or problems?
- What do you see as the community's major strengths and assets?
- What do you think should be the purpose of this organization (or effort)?

- Why should these issues be addressed?
- What would success look like?

When your organization is gathering input, the facilitator should encourage everyone to share their most idealistic, hopeful, and positive ideas. Don't worry right now about what's practical and what's not - this can be narrowed down later. Encourage everyone to be bold and participate, and to remember that you are trying to articulate a vision of a better community.

DECIDE ON THE GENERAL FOCUS OF YOUR ORGANIZATION

Once members of your organization have heard what the community has to say, it's time to decide the general focus of your organization or initiative. First of all, what topic is most important to your organization and your community? For example, will you tackle urban development or public health issues? Racism or economic opportunity?

A second question to answer is at what level will your organization work. Will your organization begin only in one school, or in one neighborhood, or in your city? Or will your initiative's focus be broader, working on a state, national, or even international level?

These are questions for which there are no easy answers. Your organization will need to consider lessons learned from the community and decide through thoughtful discussion the best direction for your organization. We suggest you [open this discussion up](#) to everyone in your organization to obtain the best results.

However, if your organization is receiving grant money or major funding from a particular agency, the grant maker may specify what the general goal of your group should be. For example, if your group accepts a grant to reduce child hunger, at least part of its mission will be devoted to this purpose. Even in these circumstances, however, the community should determine the ultimate vision and mission that will best advance what matters to local people.

DEVELOP YOUR VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

Now that your organization has a clearer understanding of what the group will do and why, you are in a prime position to develop the statements that will capture your ideas.

As you are looking at potential statements, remember to keep them broad and enduring. Vision and mission statements wide in scope allow for a sense of continuity with a community's history, traditions, and broad purposes. Additionally, vision and mission statements that are built to last will guide efforts both today and tomorrow.

Vision Statements

First of all, remind members of your organization that it often takes several vision statements to fully capture the dreams of those involved in a community improvement effort. You don't need - or even want - just one "perfect" phrase. Encourage people to suggest all of their ideas and write them down, possibly on poster paper at the front of the room, so people can be further inspired by the ideas of others. As you do this, remind the group of:

- What you have learned from your discussions with community members
- What your organization has decided will be your focus
- What you learned about vision statements at the beginning of this section

If you have a hard time getting started, you might wish to check out some of the vision statements in this section's Examples. You might ask yourself how well they meet the above suggestions.

After you have brainstormed a list of suggestions, your group can discuss critically the different ideas. Oftentimes, some of the vision statements will jump out at you - someone will suggest it, and people will just instantly think, "That's it!"

If it's more complicated than that, you should ask yourselves the following questions:

- Will it draw people to common work?
- Does it give hope for a better future?
- Will it inspire community members to realize their dreams through positive, effective action?
- Does it provide a basis for developing the other aspects of your action planning process?

A final caution: try not to get caught up in having a certain number of vision statements for your organization. Whether you ultimately end up with two vision statements or ten, what is most important is that the statements together provide a holistic view of your organization's vision.

Mission Statements

The process of writing your mission statement is similar to developing your vision statements. The same brainstorming process can help you develop possibilities for your mission statement. Remember, though, that unlike vision statements, you will want to develop a *single* mission statement for your work. After brainstorming possible statements, you will want to answer questions for each one:

- Does it describe *what* your organization will do and *why* it will do it?
- Is it concise (one sentence)?
- Is it outcome oriented?
- Is it inclusive of the goals and people who may become involved in the organization?

Together, your organization can decide on a statement that best meets these criteria.

OBTAIN CONSENSUS ON YOUR VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

Once members of your organization have developed your vision and mission statements, your next step might be to learn what other community members think of them before you use the statements regularly.

To do this, you could talk to the same community leaders or focus group members you spoke to originally. First of all, this can help you ensure that they don't find the statements offensive in any way. For example, an initiative that wants to include young men more fully

in its teen pregnancy prevention project might have "Young men in Asheville are the best informed" as one of their vision statements. But taken out of context, some people community members might believe this statement means young men are given better information or education than young women, thus offending another group of people.

Second, you will want to ensure that community members agree that the statements together capture the spirit of what they believe and desire. Your organization might find it has omitted something very important by mistake.

DECIDE HOW YOU WILL USE YOUR VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

Finally, it's important to remember that while developing the statements is a huge step for your organization worth celebration, there is more work to be done. Next, you have to decide how to use these statements. Otherwise, all of your hard work would lead to nothing. The point is to get the message across.

There are many ways in which your organization may choose to spread its vision and mission statements. To name just a few examples, you might:

- Add them to your letterhead or stationary
- Use them on your website
- Give away T-shirts, or bookmarks, or other small gifts with them
- Add them to your press kit
- Use them when you give interviews
- Display them on the cover of your annual report

...and so on. Again, this is a step that will use all of your creativity.

IN SUMMARY

Developing effective vision and mission statements are two of the most important tasks your organization will tackle because almost everything else you do is affected by these statements. We hope that this section has allowed you to feel more confident in your group's ability to create successful and inspiring vision and mission statements. Remember, think broadly and boldly! Good luck!

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