

# Tips for Developing a MISSION STATEMENT

Few processes can get as bogged down as identifying mission and developing the mission statement. It is essential to focus on the substance of the mission before trying to write a statement.

Here are five ideas to ensure a productive process and a strong result.

## **1** DON'T BEGIN BY TRYING TO WRITE SOMETHING. FOCUS FIRST ON THE MISSION ITSELF.

Instead of focusing on the organization – what it is and what it should be doing – look first to the community served. Use the needs of the community to define the organization's areas of focus and develop programs.

## **2** ENSURE THAT BOARD MEMBERS AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AGREE ON THE MISSION.

Much of the confusion, dissension, disaffection, and turmoil that characterize dysfunctional nonprofits stems from disagreement about the mission.

Mission should ultimately define program development, decision making, policy setting, fundraising strategy, and all other related board actions, so it is essential to have a common understanding of the mission. Problems arise when the mission is not used often enough in institutional decisions and evaluations.

## **3** KEEP THE MISSION VISIBLE, ROBUST, NIMBLE, AND RELEVANT.

If the mission is reviewed regularly, and if all board meetings have a mission moment (or two) that demonstrates the organization's connection with stakeholders, the potential for mission drift diminishes dramatically.

Without a connection to why the organization exists, board members can leave meetings with knowledge only of financial windfalls or shortfalls, personnel changes, capital needs, fundraising plans, and committee reports.

## **4** OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR LONGER MISSION INTERACTION.

Board retreats, board–staff retreats, and community events all offer good opportunities to convey mission. External mission moments inspire the public; lay the groundwork for mission-based advocacy, fundraising, and outreach; and create pride among the board members who are present.

## **5** CONSCIOUSLY USE MISSION AS THE BASIS FOR MAKING TOUGH DECISIONS.

A focus on mission is critical when making important organizational decisions such as expanding a program, deciding whether to maintain a program that is a financial drain but essential to mission, or evaluating a chief executive's performance in relation to keeping pace with community changes that affect program delivery.

**Resource:** [\*The Nonprofit Board's Role in Mission, Planning, and Evaluation\*](#)