Writing Your Mission and Vision Statements

There is No One Way

If you get ten nonprofit consultants in a room and ask them how to write a mission and vision statement, you may get eleven different answers. In other words, there is no one way of doing this.

That said, we've come up with what we believe is the simplest and most effective approach to mission and vision statements for mission-driven organizations.

Our Approach

We believe that:

- The mission and vision statements should work together *as a cause and effect.* You want to be able to say that "if we succeed at our mission then our vision is more likely to happen."

- Mission and vision statements should be one simple sentence each. One-sentence statements will:
    - Be easier to remember.
    - Help you and your team focus on the absolute essentials.
    - Serve as clear filters for making organizational decisions.

- The mission and vision statements should be somewhat timeless. You don't want to have to change them every year or two.

- The mission statement should succinctly state **what you are doing and for whom.**

- The vision statement should succinctly state **what the world will look like when you succeed at your mission.**

- Working together the mission and vision should provide clarity and inspiration.

The table on the following page provides you with a set of examples.

Examples of Mission and Vision Statements

Organization	Mission Statement Words that are **bold** succinctly describe what the organization does. Words in *italics* describe the subject / persons that are the organization's focus.	Vision Statement What the "world" will look like when the mission is met.
ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)	**To provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty *to animals*** *throughout the United States.*	That the United States is a humane community in which all animals are treated with respect and kindness.
Canopy	**To grow the urban tree canopy in Midpeninsula communities** *for the benefit of all.*	We envision a day when every resident of the San Francisco Midpeninsula can step outside and walk, play, and thrive under the shade of healthy trees.
charity:water	**Bringing clean, safe drinking water** to *people in developing countries.*	Every person on the planet has access to life's most basic need — clean drinking water.
Ducks Unlimited	**To conserve, restore, and manage wetlands and associated habitats** *for North America's waterfowl.*	The skies are filled with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever.
Feeding America	**To feed** *America's hungry* **through a nationwide network of member food banks.**	A hunger-free America.
Human Rights Campaign	**Working to achieve** *lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender* **equality.**	Equality for everyone.
Kiva	**To connect *people* through lending to alleviate poverty.**	We envision a world where all people – even in the most remote areas of the globe – hold the power to create opportunity for themselves and others.
Make-a-Wish	**We grant the wishes** of *children with life-threatening medical conditions.*	That people everywhere will share the power of a wish.

Want a Little More Detail?

Sometimes having a short and sweet mission statement can feel too limiting for even the most focused of organizations. If that's the case for you and your team then we recommend that you write a one-sentence mission and follow it up with a "we do this by…" statement.

For example, here is the one-sentence mission statement of the Good Shepherd Gracenter, a drug and alcohol treatment facility for women:

To help women without resources break free from drug and alcohol addiction.

Then, on their web site and in other publications, they will often include the following below the mission:

"We do this by offering:

- Transitional housing for women that provides a safe, supportive community incorporating the 12-Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous in order to promote peace and harmony in their lives.
- Recovery mentoring and the promotion of whole-person wellness.
- Paths to higher education, skill-building and sustainable employment.
- Opportunities to practice the principles of restorative justice by taking responsibility for one's actions and making amends that can lead to a transformation of people, relationships and community."

In this way they are able to have both a short and succinct mission statement and provide some depth of explanation.

Editing an Existing Mission Statement

Here is a real example (name changed) of a mission statement that we think is too long, too hard to remember, and doesn't pair with a vision statement.

The Stone Creek Running Club is a diverse community of runners of all ages and abilities. Through training, group running experiences, and participation in running events, we encourage and support our members to attain their running goals, foster a spirit of camaraderie, and give back to the local running community. (50 words)

Did you get all of that? We didn't.

We think this would be much stronger if it simply said something like this:

To inspire a love of running *for everyone in Stone Creek. (11 words)*

This refined statement is timeless, states what they do (inspire a love of running) for whom (everyone in Stone Creek), is easy to remember and is more inspirational.

If they wanted to provide more detail about their strategies then they could say:

We do this by:

- *Welcoming runners of all ages and abilities.*
- *Providing effective and fun training and group running experiences.*
- *Hosting and participating in a variety of running events.*

The running club can then change their specific strategies, above, without having to change their mission statement.

Further, all of this would point toward a common and inspiring vision:

> *Stone Creek will be a model of a healthy, active and engaged community.*

Now it's Your Turn to Craft Your Mission and Vision Statements

Mission Statement

A. As briefly and specifically as possible, state what your organization does.

B. As briefly and specifically as possible, state who your organization serves.

C. Draft your mission statement by combining the content from A and B above. You may have to write several different versions to get it right. Refer to the table on a prior page for inspiration.

Vision Statement

As briefly and specifically as possible, describe what the "world" will look like when you succeed at your mission statement. Refer to the table on a prior page for inspiration.