



Writing Effective Nonprofit Mission and Vision Statements

Guidance and Case Studies

Are you concerned that your mission or vision statements aren't aligning with your organization? Or maybe you don't have clearly defined statements because you don't know where to start?

Mission Met has created this brief guide to help you tackle your mission and vision statements. Keep reading to learn how to create statements you can be proud of, whether you haven't started yet or you've spent months, years, or decades trying to find the right words.

This guide comes with examples from recent Mission Met presentations of "Bring Your Own Mission (BYOM)." Learn how Eric Ryan, co-founder of Mission Met, brought his expertise to the nonprofits that have attended the events through case studies from the live mission statement workshops.

The key outcome is that this guide will provide you with a clear and simple methodology to write your mission and vision statements.



Crafting Your Mission and Vision

Less Is More

The rule of thumb with mission, vision, and values statements is that less is actually more. Nonprofits tend to want to wrap everything that their organization is and does into their mission statement—their programs, culture, objectives, professionalism, etc. In reality, this makes a mission statement too long and lofty and it doesn't end up saying anything meaningful at all.

Please note: This can also be said about values; which end up as a long list of values that could belong to any organization. It's likely that you and your team value lots of things: teamwork, integrity, and respect. However, the longer your values list, the less likely it is to be remembered, so it won't provide any focus on what is really important.

If you and your team are going to be in alignment with your mission and vision then you've got to work to get those statements more streamlined so that they are easy to understand and communicate. A well written mission statement can contribute a lot to your organization's success: guide decision-making, inspire your team, attract stakeholders, etc. You cannot sail a ship without a guiding compass.

Perhaps your nonprofit has already created its mission and vision statements, but the discussion feels like it has gone on and on in the pursuit of the perfect statements. I'm about to tell you something that may put you at ease: I've never seen perfectly worded mission or vision statements. You can **always** make an argument for additional wordsmithing; don't worry about perfection. Work to get something documented, talk about it, use it for several months to a year, and then review and revise the statements as needed.

Let's Focus On Mission and Vision Statements

Your mission and vision are your core guiding statements, and funders often require them to consider whether you're a good match for their priorities.

Based on years of learning from organizations, I've defined mission and vision statements as the following:

- Mission Statement: One succinct and somewhat timeless sentence that states what your organization does and for whom
- Vision Statement: One succinct, inspirational, and somewhat timeless sentence that describes what "the world" will look like when your organization succeeds at its mission

You may have noticed that each definition states that each statement is only one sentence. The reason for that is that 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

Importantly, there is a cause-and-effect relationship between your mission and vision. You want to be able to say that "if we succeed at our mission, then our vision is more likely to happen." Therefore, you can't write a mission and vision statement in isolation from each other. They are two parts of a whole.

Let's look at some examples.

Below are some real organizations and their real mission and vision statements. Note that words that are **bold** succinctly describe what the organization does, and words in *italics* describe the subjects/persons that are of focus.

ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)	To provide for effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals <i>throughout the United States.</i>
Feeding America	To feed <i>America's hungry</i> through a nationwide network of member food banks.
charity:water	Bringing clean, safe drinking water <i>to people in developing countries.</i>

And the vision statements—what the "world" will look like when the mission is met.

ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)	The United States is a humane community in which all animals are treated with respect and kindness.
Feeding America	A hunger-free America.
charity:water	Every person on the planet has access to life's most basic need—clean drinking water.

If You Don't Quite Fit the Mold . . .

Sometimes, having a succinct mission statement can feel too limiting for even the most focused of organizations. In that instance, I recommend that you supplement your mission and vision with a brief bulleted list to breathe in a little more depth.

For example, here's the mission and vision of an organization that we've worked with at Mission Met called the Good Shepherd Gracenter. They added an additional section to their mission statement to be featured in a few publications.



As you can see, they have a one sentence Mission Statement and then have a section that says "We do this by offering:" and it looks something like this:

Mission To help women without resources break free from drug and alcohol addiction and create a hopeful future for themselves and others.

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.

Vision We envision a day when women in recovery can live fully, strengthen their families, and enrich their communities.

The bullet points have changed as the organization grew, but they offer good support for their more permanent one-sentence mission.

Using this framework, we'll now go through some of the mission and vision statements that we workshopped at our our live presentation events.

NOTE: Some organizations submitted their mission statement and vision statements, while some brought only their mission statement. Also the organization names have been changed for the purpose of this document.



Freedom Foragers

freedomforagers

Existing Mission Statement:

Freedom Foragers uses a unique mix of education, organizing, and advocacy to help people across New York City cultivate community gardens, sustain grassroots groups, grow food, engage youth in low-income neighborhoods, and address issues critical to the future of food justice and urban agriculture.

Guidance:

- Your mission and vision statements are cause and effect. For example, if Freedom Foragers promotes food justice and urban agriculture, THEN sustainable and equitable communities will be achieved.
- Identify a key cornerstone of your programs, which in Freedom Foragers case is to promote urban community gardens. This umbrella activity should be the apex of your mission and help define your priorities and decisions.
- Add some extra bullet points to flesh out the means by which you complete your mission. For example, cultivate community gardens, sustain grassroots groups, grow food, engage youth in low-income neighborhoods, etc.
- Be specific. Attract people that want to support your cause and repel those that aren't interested.

Revised Mission Statement:

To promote and support the community garden movement in New York City.

Revised Vision Statement:

Sustainable and more equitable communities across NYC.



New York Volunteer Alliance



Existing Mission Statement:

New York Volunteer Alliance's core mission is to inspire, mobilize, and equip individuals and groups to take positive action to address pressing challenges, support nonprofits, and strengthen the quality of life in our community.

Guidance:

- Avoid jargon. Make your mission capable of being comprehended by all potential stakeholders. In this case, New York Volunteer Alliance is trying to create transformational experiences through volunteer opportunities.
- Simplify your mission statement to make it more powerful and memorable for your team.
- Incorporate your organization's tagline into your mission statement—if applicable. Flesh out the tagline in added bullet points for a whole description of who your nonprofit wants to attract and serve.
- Don't write your vision into your mission statement. Determine how the world will be different after your nonprofit has done its job, and you have found your vision statement.

Revised Mission Statement:

We help people connect to transformational volunteer opportunities.



Hart Cemetery Organization

HART
CEMETERY
ORGANIZATION

Existing Mission Statement:

Hart Cemetery Organization is a nonprofit assisting families and individuals with limited resources in accessing information and opportunities to visit City Cemetery on Hart Island, Bronx, NY.

Guidance:

- Mission statements are relatively timeless. It should reflect all new initiatives.
- Use bullet points to expand upon your mission. For example, Hart Island would answer what accessible information means—like online information, visitation, the national park, etc.

Revised Mission Statement:

To make City Cemetery on Hart Island accessible to all.



Rustic Healing

Existing Mission Statement:

Rustic Healing offers outdoor adventures for cancer survivors that promote healing and strengthening of the mind, body, and spirit. We work year round to create, build, and fund life changing outdoor adventures for cancer survivors and the people who love them. Programs are created to inspire, empower, and heal survivors of all ages and any diagnosis.



Existing Vision Statement:

Rustic Healing's programs get survivors outdoors, engaged in recreational physical activity, and connected with one another for emotional and peer support. Rustic Healing programs strive to empower survivors and their loved ones to embrace an active lifestyle rich with recreation, friendship, and nourishing foods, all of which have been demonstrated to improve overall health.

Guidance:

- Simplify your mission statement. Make it easy for external stakeholders to understand your mission in only one sentence. For example, Rustic Healing simply provides healing outdoor adventures for cancer survivors.
- Use words from your tagline to help your team remember your mission.
- Your mission should be timeless.

Revised Mission Statement:

To provide healing outdoor adventures for cancer survivors that inspire, empower, and heal.

Revised Mission Statement:

Cancer survivors have active lifestyles that improve their overall health.



Alpha CDC



Existing Mission Statement:

Alpha Community Development Corporation aims to equip individuals, families, and children with resources, tools, and opportunities to break the cycle of generational poverty and achieve self-sufficiency through education, employment, economic development, and advocacy.

Existing Vision Statement:

Alpha Community Development Corporation seeks to transform Northwest Dayton into a community supportive of children and families. By focusing on three aspects of community development: youth development, family development, and economic development. With programming working in the areas of breaking the cycle of generational poverty, achieving self-sufficiency through education, employment, economic development, and advocacy.

Guidance:

- Find your core purpose. CDCs do a broad range of things, but ultimately try to break the cycle of generational poverty.
- If your organization does a lot of things, break it down in the form of bullet points.

Revised Mission Statement:

To break the cycle of generational poverty in Northwest Dayton.

Revised Mission Statement:

Northwest Dayton is an equitable community where everyone has the opportunity to create their desired lifestyle.



Conclusion

Each organization is unique, and its mission and vision statements will be just as unique and nuanced. We hope that this guide has provided a bit more structure to get you on the right path towards crafting your mission and vision statements.

Below are some additional resources that may further help you find your organization's mission and vision.

Read [Eric Ryan's book, *Mission Met: Proven Strategic Planning Guidance to Help You Build a Financially Secure and Impactful Nonprofit*](#), which includes a chapter about mission, vision, and values statements.

This insightful article from the Stanford Social Innovation Review follows some of the structure that we use to create an [eight-word mission statement](#).

Top Nonprofits also has two articles on [mission statements](#) and [vision statements](#) that also aligns with our approach.

And be sure to check out more of [Mission Met's](#) work and reach out for consulting if you could use more specific guidance or need assistance in developing and executing your organization's strategic plan.

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