

# Mission & Vision Roadmap

The Small Nonprofit's Guide to  
Mission & Vision Statements  
that Make an Impact



# Why Mission & Vision Statements are Important

If you have found your way to this guide, it is safe to assume that you are struggling in some ways to engage the world in your nonprofit's purpose. You are proud of the work you are doing, but you can't seem to connect with those that care about what you do. Maybe your calls for volunteers are being met with silence; maybe fundraising campaigns are falling flat; or, maybe it is proving difficult to hire the right people, who care as much as you do about the work you do. Whatever it is, if you aren't connecting with your audience, a great place to start is by assessing your mission and vision.

In the nonprofit world, your mission and vision are the foundation on which you build your entire organization. Your strategic plan, your programmatic strategy, your fundraising efforts – they all tie back to your mission and vision, and what you have stated is ***your ultimate purpose in this world.***

Unfortunately, too many nonprofits write a mission and vision and then rarely reflect on it and use it in their day to day work. It ends up being a long, academic-sounding sentence (or paragraph...) that gets too into the weeds of **how** they change the world **rather than why.**

In general, both your mission and vision should be:

- **Engaging and easy to understand.** You want the random person dropping by your website to immediately understand why you exist (and why you are worth supporting!)
- **Not operational or tactical - focus on the big picture.** The “how” of what you do is appropriate for your strategic plan, but your mission & vision should stay focused on your “why”.
- **Just as clear on what you DON'T do, as on what you DO.** You are not everything to everyone. Make it clear what is in your wheelhouse and what isn't!
- **Inspirational & aspirational.** It should engage your audience and fire them up to help you out in your work!
- **Short and sweet!** Think easy-enough-to-memorize-and-recite short. If you can't remember it and you work in it day in and day out, then your audience certainly won't either.

# Assessing Your Current Mission & Vision Statements

## Your Mission Statement

In short, your mission statement should answer the question:

### Why do we exist?

Your mission statement should:

- Be a single sentence! (*This seems simple - but so many organizations feel the urge to add more detail to their mission. Keep it short and sweet!*)
- Clearly define your organization's reason for existence - what problem in the world are you hyper-focused on solving?
- Focus on the *why*, not the *how*.

[Bridgespan](#) offers a great explanation of a mission statement:

“A **succinct expression** of an organization's **essential reason** for existence or **core purpose**.”

So, to offer an (entirely made up) example...

A great mission statement *isn't*:

We teach free ballet, tap, and jazz dance classes to young girls ages 4 - 14.

Instead, a great mission statement might be:

We **build girls' confidence**, strength, and self-esteem **by nurturing a love of dance**.

# Assessing Your Current Mission & Vision Statements

Alongside your mission statement, your vision aims bigger. It answers the question:

## ***What is the future we are working to create?***

The key here is: if one day you were to reach your vision, your organization would close up shop.

As nonprofits, we aren't meant to live forever. Yes, the issues we work against are not easily solvable, and often organizations are needed for many years.

But what many nonprofits forget is that the goal is for them to no longer need to exist. And your vision statement should summarize your organization's "end point" succinctly.

To define your vision, consider:

- What would the world look like if our services were no longer needed?
- What is our single long term goal?

*To tie to the earlier example:*

*Our vision is a world where **every girl builds a foundation of self esteem and belief in herself** early on in life, and draws on that foundation as she grows to go after her dreams.*

# Refining Your Mission and Vision

If you think your mission and vision could use a revision, the exercise below offers some help in getting started. Because these statements are so foundational to your organization's purpose, formal mission and vision statements should be reviewed, discussed, and adopted by the entire Board of Directors. This brainstorming exercise can act as a starting point for updating your mission & vision alongside your Board members.

First, ask yourself: what do you do in your community? (Let this be as technical and operational as you want. We are starting here with the "what" -- we'll get to the "why" next!)

*Example:* We teach free dance classes to girls.

*Your turn:*

Now, look at that sentence above. Why does the "what" that you described matter?

*Example:* Because we believe in dance's ability to build character and self-esteem.

*Your turn:*

Now, why does that matter?

*Example:* Because girls so often lack self-esteem and it hinders them from reaching their fullest potential later in life.

*Your turn:*

Ok, but one more time, WHY!

*Example:* Because we believe girls should have every opportunity to reach their dreams and are committed to making that available to as many girls as possible.

*Your turn:*

You may need to continue this “but why” process several more times. The more you do it, the more it can help to dig into your true purpose and how to communicate that purpose to the world. Ask yourself why (and write down your answers!) as many times as it takes to help you to get to the heart of this purpose. From there, take what you’ve written to rework your answers into an updated mission and vision that can be reviewed, discussed and approved by the full Board of Directors.

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Once you have a revised mission and vision statement, you can ask yourself the following questions to help confirm you’re on the right track:

- If I were reading this on my first visit to our organization’s website, would I feel inspired to act and compelled to support the cause?
- Do the statements clearly state what we do and DON’T do?
- Can I, as a staff person, recite this from memory in a way that feels authentic and with passion?
- Would these statements help me in making organizational decisions? Can I use them as guide posts?

**Have questions  
or need in-depth support?  
Let's chat!**

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